



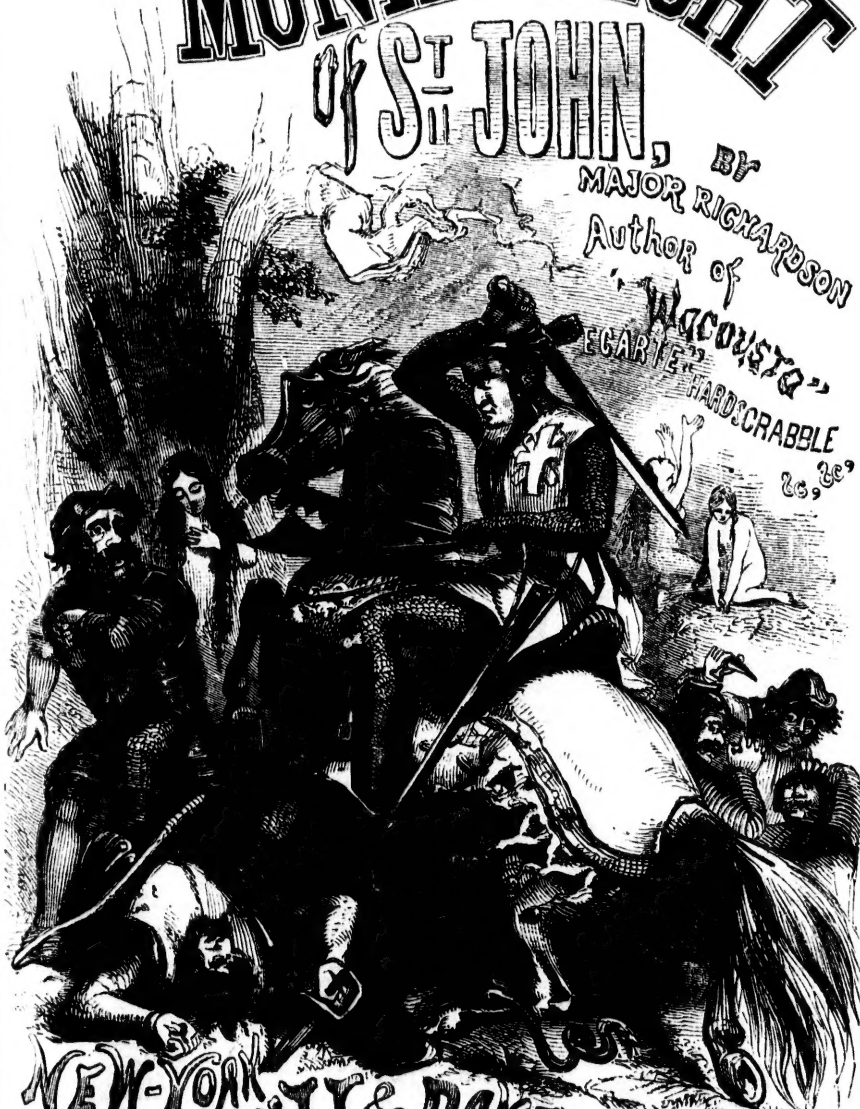
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THE MONK KNIGHT of ST JOHN,

BY
MAJOR RICHARDSON
Author of

"WAGGONERS"
"EGARIE"
"HARDSCRABBLE"
&c., &c.



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THE

MONK KNIGHT

OF

ST. JOHN.

A Tale of the Crusades.

BY

MAJOR RICHARDSON,

KNIGHT OF ST. FERDINAND,

AUTHOR OF "ECARTE," "WAGOSTA," ETC.



NEW YORK:
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THE MONK KNIGHT OF ST. JOHN.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

RETURNING from San Sebastian in the autumn of 1837, by the way of San Juan de Luz, Bayonne and Bordeaux, and being desirous of visiting Auvergne, where I had heard there was an old chateau, connected with which was some wild traditionary tale, I determined to gratify the strong curiosity I felt, personally, to inform myself if there really was any good foundation for a story which had been related to me by an elderly French gentleman in the latter charming town.

Having at my disposal plenty of that commodity which belongs to idle men—leisure—I sent on my baggage by diligence to Amiens, merely reserving a change of linen, &c., which was carefully stowed away in my light knapsack. Thus equipped, with my gun on my shoulder, and with a bottle of the best cogniac the Hotel de Lille could afford, stuck in one of the ample side-pockets of my shooting jacket, I set forth *en route*. It is needless to fatigue the reader with the details of the journey, therefore, I will at once introduce him to the old *garde chasse*, who, in the absence of his Seigneur, and indeed in that of every other member of the household, seemed to combine in his person all the offices usual to the establishment, for with the exception of a little shoeless *garçon* who attended to the cows, and a couple of Spanish pointers, nearly as old as their master, there was nothing bearing life to be seen about the place.

When, following the course of the narrow Dordogne, I reached the venerable pile, which was situated about three leagues from Clermont, and bordering upon a forest that swept semicircularly round its wings towards the front, I found the sun-burnt *garde chasse* seated on the bank of a streamlet, which ran outside the grass-covered elevation that denoted the once existence of a battlement, and arranging the flint of his gun—his two old dogs crouching meanwhile at his feet—evidently watching his movements and anticipating sport.

Here was the very man for my purpose, and engaged in the manner in which I most could have desired to have seen him. The freemasonry of the gun is not a bad letter of introduction.

"Good morning, brother sportsman," I said, approaching him, for the

low growling of his dogs had told him that a stranger was near. He looked up, and I touched my cap to him in salutation.

"*Ah ! pardieu, Monsieur,*" he exclaimed in his own tongue—that in which I had addressed him ; " I am very glad to see you. I was thinking what dull work it would be without a companion, and here you are, all equipped, as if St. Peter himself had sent you from Heaven to my aid. We shall have capital sport, sir ; few people venture here to disturb the birds, and I having had a twinge of the rheumatism, have not been out for a week past."

" And so am I well pleased to have met you," I said. " When I venture in pursuit of game I prefer to have an experienced hand like yourself to lead the way. Capital pointers those of yours. Of the real Spanish breed, I perceive!"

" Yes, Monsieur ; neither of them can be less than nine years of age. Their noses are well used to the scent. But, *allons*. The sun is beginning to get a little fierce, and if we would escape a broiling, we must gain the cover of the wood. But perhaps Monsieur would like some refreshment first. The Chateau de Boiscourt does not afford what it did when my great-great-grandfather was steward to the noble Baron, who served in the *terre sainte* in the time of the crusades, but at least it can furnish Fromage de Rochefort and Neuschâtel, bread baked by my own hands, and *eau de vie ! comme ça*."

Here he had himself touched upon the outwork of the subject I was so anxious to introduce, but I felt that this was not the moment to pursue it. I might startle him—excite suspicion as to my motive—put him upon his guard, and thus hear nothing. I trusted, however, to my well-filled flask of cogniac to draw forth the garrulity of the *garde chasse* at a subsequent period of the day—if indeed there was anything to be communicated.

" I thank you," I said, in reply to his offer of refreshment, " I breakfasted at a farm-house about half way between this and Clermont ; besides, *voilà de la bonne, goûtez en ;*" and I handed him the flask to judge for himself.

" *Pardieu,*" he exclaimed, after having sipped a good wine-glass full, " this is indeed *la véritable* ; I am afraid that I have none such to offer you."

" It will restore us when fatigued with our walk after the birds," I returned. " Let us be off, then."

" I see Monsieur has no dog," observed the old man, as we moved off towards a distant copse which he said abounded with partridges, "*Coco, viens Toto.*"

" I lost my dog on my way from San Juan de Luz to Bordeaux," I replied. " These are very magnificent grounds," I continued, after a pause, " although I must confess the chateau is a little the worse for wear. You say that your great-great-grandfather was born here. Have all your family, from him, been born here?"

" *Pardieu !* and his great-great-grandfather before him. Monsieur forgets I spoke of the time of the crusade in the Holy Land. My fathers have lived with the Barons de Boiscourt from their first existence as a family. We know all their secrets ; and," putting his finger on the tip of his nose, " we know how to keep them, too."

I was not sorry that Coco at that moment started a covey of partridges, for I felt that I had been imprudent in thus talking of other than general matters. I said no more.

Our sport throughout the day was fair—the hardy *garde chasse* bagging twenty brace, and myself sixteen and a half. More than once he had complained of a return of his rheumatism, and I had prevailed upon him occasionally to rest, and as often to restore himself from my brandy flask. By this time, we were the best friends in the world, and when we had returned home, literally laden with our game, nothing would induce the old man to part with so good a *camarade* until the morning.

This was exactly what I had desired, and although I pretended that I had no time to spare, but must be in Clermont that night, I yielded, with what gratification it may be presumed, to his proposal, to give me the only bed-room that was kept in any sort of repair, yet which contained the nuptial bed, preserved as a sort of heir-loom, of the first Baron de Boiscourt, who had served in Palestine.

About nine o'clock, our supper of partridges and home-made bread, moistened on my part by the very indifferent eau de vie of the *garde chasse* having been dispatched, and a pipe smoked, the old man conducted me to my dormitory. The chateau was, as has been represented, very old indeed. The outside being built of stone, had borne the ravages of age pretty well, but it was evident that the interior had many and many a time been renewed. One end of the foundation had evidently sunk, for there was an inclination in that direction which threatened to overthrow it altogether, were it not for the support of strong oaken props placed at the gable-end. The wide staircase that conducted from the lower apartments where we had supped, (indeed, we had taken our meal where we had cooked it—in the kitchen)—was crazy and worm-eaten, the balustrades gone, and the footing, consequently, anything but secure. Arrived at the first landing, we passed along a corridor of some extent, and then, turning abruptly to the left, entered what had the appearance of having been a *salon*, at the end of which was a shorter corridor, or passage, opening into a large bed-room—the same alluded to by the *garde chasse*.

The oil lamp, which the latter carried in his hand, did not throw much light upon surrounding objects. Everything wore a sombre look, and was uninviting enough. The high ebony bedstead, which had evidently once been richly carved, exhibited but faint traces of the sculptor's chisel. One of its broken legs had been replaced by another of mahogany, while the bed itself, though far more modern, did not exhibit the most tempting appearance. It needed no great penetration to see that the whole was a relic of by-gone centuries. The large and tall-backed chairs, of ebony also, were much in the same condition, and the floors of those rooms, like all others in the chateau, being paved with the rude tiles that were in general use in France in the eleventh century, were in many parts crumbling to decay. There was little of the ornamental in the arrangements of those apartments, and the only things that attracted my attention were a large ebony crucifix, and a group of three figures—tall as life, beautifully carved, in high relief, and, with clasped hands, grouped round a figure of Cupid, bearing a torch in his right hand.

The one was a female of middle size, beautifully formed—the second a knight-crusader in his war dress—and the third a very tall and symmetrically formed, though rather heavy warrior, whose costume, and particularly the cross cut prominently on his left breast, denoted him to be a knight of the brotherhood of St. John.

From what I had heard of the tradition, the character of this group, which stood between the head of the bedstead and the damp wall, left me no room to doubt that the rumor was correct. I asked, with as much indifference as I could assume, whom the tableau was meant to represent, observing at the same time that its age must be nearly coeval with that of the chateau. The *garde chasse*, who had helped himself, as I intended he should, from my cogniac bottle, until he became communicative, was now by no means disposed to taciturnity.

"Ah, Monsieur," he said, "there is a curious story about these figures. They represent the Baroness, who is said to have been the best, the kindest-hearted, and the most beautiful woman of her day in all France—the Baron, her husband, and Abdallah, a monk knight of the Holy Cross, and the sworn friend of the Baron."

My curiosity became more and more excited—my interest was intense.

"And what, my good friend—but try another *gout* of brandy. I think the night is chilly, and after walking so much, the night air may bring on a return of the rheumatism. What, my brave *camarade*, is the strange story you speak about?"

"Ah, ça, that does one good," as he returned the brandy flask, which was now nearly empty: "why, Monsieur, you see, as my family have from generation to generation been in the service of the Barons de Boiscourt, I seldom open my lips about these things, not that I think there is much harm in the story as it goes, but people don't all think alike, and one does not care to have remarks made."

"Well, but surely—"

"Yes, Monsieur, I know what you would say—you think that I might make an exception in your favor. Well, *camarade*, I think so too, for you are an honest fellow. But, look you, several people have tried to pump me on the subject before: They never could succeed, for I always pretend to know nothing of the rumor which, they say, has got abroad about the doings of old in the chateau."

"You do know them, then. Well, my friend, since I have had the good fortune to please you, do gratify me so far as to relate the circumstances."

"*Diantre*, it is too long a story for me to tell, but if you give me your word—*foi de gentilhomme*—that you will never speak of it while there is one of the family of de Boiscourt living, I will put you in possession of some papers which I found secreted in a small tin case, inserted in the right leg of the figure of the Baron."

"Found secreted in his leg!—How came it there?"

"Placed there, pardieu, I suppose, by himself, as the present young Baron, who, *entre nous*, is a great roué, and prefers Paris to living here on his *rentes*, declares. I found it, it is now nearly five years, while dusting and cleaning the figures, and gave it to him. He eagerly opened the case,

thinking that it might contain money or jewels; but nothing but written papers, which the exclusion of the air had preserved, were to be seen."

"Bah, Picard," he said pettishly, after reading a few lines, "these are nothing but fusty old parchments—old as the time of the Crusade itself. It is a sort of history, I believe, of these wooden images. Here, put them back into the case, and take care of them. If I have nothing else to amuse me, when next I visit this old rat-trap of a chateau, I will look over them."

"And they are there now!" I said eagerly.

"Where else should they be?" was the reply of the *garde chasse*. If Monsieur will assist me in turning down this heavy tripod, I will soon produce them."

The weight of three full length figures in ebony was by no means trifling; however, with some effort, having in view, as we had, the avoidance of all injury to the figures, we turned them sideways on a blanket which Picard placed on the brick floor. A large cork was removed from the foot he had indicated, and the tin case drawn forth. The figures were suffered to remain in their recumbent position, the *garde chasse* deeming it unnecessary to restore them to their proper position until the following morning, by which time I said I should have concluded my examination of the manuscript.

"Ah, ça, camarade, you are all right now, but recollect, *foi de gentilhomme*, no babbling the secrets of the family, while one of them lives. *Votre main la dessus*."

I took his hand in affirmation of the pledge. "Depend upon it," I said, "I will keep my promise to the letter. While a Baron de Boiscourt lives, the knowledge of what those papers contain shall never escape me."

"Dame! I know well that you are a man of honor; but," he continued, "I must trim your lamp with a little more oil. It burns dimly, and wants renewing. I must leave you in the dark, while I go down for a supply."

Burning with curiosity to open the case and read its contents, and yet dreading that I never should make out the quaint old French of that day, I awaited with some impatience the re-appearance of the *garde chasse*, who at length came in, not only with the lamp newly trimmed, but with a supply of oil, in case I should require it before I had completed the deciphering of the parchment.

Having properly disposed the lamp near the head of the bed, and lighted another which he had had the precaution to bring with him, Picard shook me by the hand with a "Good night, sir hunter;" and withdrew.

Left to myself, I was not long in undressing, for my eagerness to open the manuscript was great. I removed the lid of the box—examined a few pages, and found to my great joy that there was no difficulty in making them out, although there was an idiom which makes me prefer rendering it in my own language, retaining the original only in the few letters that are introduced.

As I stepped impatiently into bed, the old timbers groaned until I thought the whole would come to pieces. Happily they did not, for I would not for worlds have been instrumental in destroying that relic of departed loveliness—the resting-place which, centuries before, had received the beautiful limbs

of the woman, whose faultless image was, even then, lying in shadow a few paces beyond me.

The first words I read on the first scroll of parchment were these: "Whoever may condemn, while reading these pages, knows not his own heart. Man is the creature of circumstances. What I have done I repent not of. Be wise also, and make not evil where none exists." Then came the story, which is vividly impressed upon my memory, and, in substance, was as follows:—

CHAPTER II.

DURING the reign of chivalry in Palestine, it was no uncommon circumstance for the warmest attachments to be formed among the knights and warriors engaged in that sanguinary struggle. Many a Pylades had his Orestes. Many a Damon his Pythias. They fought side by side—ate together—slept in the same tent, and, in the hour of danger, were ever ready to lend the hand of succour, either personally or through the forces they led to battle. Community of interest and of position induced community of thought and of purpose. The inmost secrets of their hearts were laid bare; each delighted not less in the confidence reposed by himself in his brother in arms, than in that which was paid back to him in kind, and the more sacred the character of the disclosures which the glowing heart dictated, the more deeply riveted became the links of the chain which bound them in indissoluble friendship. The cold and soul-annihilating conventionalisms of modern life were then unknown. Selfishness had not attained that refinement which progressive civilization has nurtured.

It was on the evening of a day which had been passed in conflict with the Saracens, and not six months before the recapture of Jerusalem, that two knights, who had doffed their harness, entered a very handsome tent, part of the encampment without its walls. He who evidently was the youngest was Alfred, the Baron de Boiscourt. He was elegantly dressed; his doublet being of crimson velvet, embroidered with gold, and on his breast he wore the cross of his order, while a graceful plume floated from the hat which adorned his brow. His features were animated and handsome, and from his deep blue, dark-lashed eye, there beamed the fires of a soul which not even his frank open countenance could belie. His hair, which fell in rich profusion of ringlets over his fine shoulders, was of a dark chesnut, approaching to an auburn, and through the small and expressive mouth, as he smiled some remark to his companion, came sounds sweet but powerful, which seemed to have been given to him by nature to warm the heart of her who should be exposed to their influence. His teeth, not too large, were dazzlingly white, and his lips and chin were models of their kind. His height might have been about six feet, but the grace and elegance of his carriage were such that, finely proportioned as it was, his figure might have been taken for something less.

His companion was of a different mould. He was of almost Herculean proportion, and in the plain black monkish robe, furnished with its eight-pointed white cross, which he wore as was his wont, when not in the armor of his order, seemed even taller and larger. A low skull-cap covered his head, with ut however impeding the flow of the masses of dark hair, slightly sprinkled with gray, which fell over shoulders even more ample than those of the younger Knight; coarse sandals were upon his feet, and from his full chest depended a large crucifix of ebony, to which was attached a chain of solid gold. A coarse mantle of black was thrown across his shoulders, and on the left breast of this was the unsullied cross which denoted him to be a Knight of the Holy Order of St. John.

The face of this warrior Monk was noble in the extreme. It wore an expression of calm and quiet dignity, which even the fierce tumult of recent battle had not in the slightest degree ruffled—an air of benevolence, which it was impossible to contemplate without being impressed with the most favorable feelings towards their possessor. His forehead was high, intellectual, full of thought; and the remainder of his features were fashioned in a spirit of strict harmony with the general character of his most winning countenance. His eyes were large and dark, and although their habitual expression was that of softness, corresponding with his other features, they would occasionally kindle with a fire that proved the soul within to be as capable of animation as that of him who had been the least tutored to command his passion. His hair was, as has just been said, extremely thick, and fell over his shoulders in large masses, adding, as it were, to the majesty, and dignity, and vigor of his striking personal appearance. His frame was firmly knit together, his chest, like that of a Hercules, and his muscles were like cords of iron.

"Beshrew me, Abdallah," said the Baron de Boiscourt, as, having entered the spacious tent, they now sat down to refresh themselves with a flask of Cyprus wine, which the latter had desired his page, Rudolph—a beautiful and blooming boy, fair as the Narcissus of old—to place before them; "Beshrew me, I say, but my soul yearns to you, as though you were the first-born of my mother's womb. This is the fourth time you have saved my life from those Saracen dogs. But for you to-day that infidel would have carried off my head, instead of pricking my shoulder. In fact, I had given myself up for lost, hemmed in as I was by at least a score, and my last thoughts were, I confess, less of Heaven than of my adored Ernestina, and of you, my friend, my noble Abdallah."

"Of me?" said the Monk, with surprise—"that indeed was kind, generous de Boiscourt; and deep and truthful indeed must be your regard for me, when, in your supposed dying hour, you could suffer my image to mix with that of such a one as you have described the Lady Ernestina to be."

"I thought of you both," pursued the handsome and the enthusiastic Baron, "as being the dearest to my heart, and I determined in my soul that nothing should content me until I obtained your promise, in the event of my fall before this war is over, to abjure your monastic vows, and make the sweet wife of my bosom your own."

The pulses of the Monk swelled visibly, his pale and noble face became for a moment suffused with a deep flush, but quickly recovering his self-possession, he said, with his wonted calmness:

"Believe me, de Boiscourt, this could never be. Firstly, I could never prove false to my vows of chastity, even at such a price; for think you," he added with sudden energy, while his eyes were lighted up with an unwonted fire, "that I have listened unmoved to the tale of her superhuman loveliness, as told by yourself? No, my friend—no, my generous, noble de Boiscourt, tempt me not. I am a priest, it is true, yet am I but a man. Even to see her now would be to seal the downfall of my honor; but wherefore," he resumed, after a pause, "do I talk thus; I have, as you say, saved your life, my friend, for the fourth time. You were surrounded by numbers, and notwithstanding all your valor—notwithstanding that your good battle-axe had hewn down seven of your assailants, you must indeed have perished against such fearful odds, had not fortune—fortune do I term it!—had not instinct—friendship—the desire to preserve to her chaste love the lord of your noble lady, whose image, de Boiscourt, you have painted as a thing of light and life, led me to your rescue."

"Proceed," said the gay and reckless Knight, pleased with the avowal that the heart, hitherto so insensible to the fascinations of women, should thus have been reached through the imagination, by the idol of his own soul. "You do not then include my Ernestina in that almost detestation with which you regard women in general?"

"Dear de Boiscourt," answered the Monk solemnly, as he raised his tall figure to its full height, "you know that I do not; I have just now told you that I do not. But tempt me not further, I entreat you. Do not bring images before my eyes, which I dare not—ought not to think of. Let me regard the Lady Ernestina as a daughter of grace and charity—as a Madonna of the church, rather than as a mere daughter of earth."

"How charmingly she would look in the coarse garb of a Sister of Charity," pursued de Boiscourt, "only fancy her as such in a cloister, Abdallah. Her graceful carriage—her noble and voluptuous figure—masses of hair of the darkest brown, through which the eager comb can scarcely find its way, falling over shoulders of polished alabaster, and terminating only mid-leg; eyes of the deepest, softest blue, surmounted by marked brows of the same dark shade, and long eye-lashes which mock the glossiness of the raven's wing. A Grecian nose, most delicately formed—lips of coral that have stolen all their fragrance from the honeysuckle and the rose—teeth polished and dazzling as the ivory—two sweet dimples on her downy cheek, which ever show themselves when those coral lips divide to blazon forth the gems within—these, with a moulded arm, and hand, and foot —"

"De Boiscourt—dear de Boiscourt," interrupted the Monk, trembling, and with the paleness of agony depicted on his countenance—"is this your friendship for me?"

"Fancy all these," continued the Baron, with a certain degree of fierceness, as he felt his blood to glow at the recollection of his wife's beauty, and pressing, at the same time, heavily on the shoulder of the monk—"fancy

these—fancy a bosom moulded by the hand of love, on which a divinity might well desire to repose his head.”

The breast of Abdallah heaved—his brow was knitted—his features were fixed in an expression almost of despair.

“Think of these—fancy *all* her host of charms concealed beneath the sanctified dress and air of a Sister of Charity, and inhabiting the same cloister with yourself.”

“What then?” said Abdallah, with an effort at composure: “the cloister well merits the self-sacrifice of earth’s fairest daughters at the monastic shrine.”

“Tell me then,” he asked, seriously, “since you will not break that foolish vow by espousing Ernestina in the event of my fall, promise me, at least, that you will clothe her in some such garb, and place her in a cloister near your own.”

“Should she desire it, certainly,” replied the monk; “but what reason is there to think that such will be her determination.”

“Because, should I fall—and I have a vague presentiment that I shall—I am satisfied Ernestina will be nowhere so happy as near yourself.”

“Near me!” and the Monk started.

“Even so, Abdallah; you shall hear what she writes. The courier who arrived yesterday in the camp from France, brought me this letter from Auvergne.” So saying, he took from a small trunk that lay in the corner of the tent, a long scroll of parchment, which, after having removed the string, he read to the Monk, dwelling especially on those passages which related immediately to himself.—Thus the Lady Ernestina wrote:

“But though I pine and languish for my lord’s return, as one whose lips have simply tasted of the cup of bliss, which has now, for three long years been absent from my touch, it is my great delight to think of my lord and of his noble friend, the warrior Monk, Abdallah. Indeed, my lord, you must not be jealous, but it is not so certain to me of which I think the most—you, whose dear life has been so often saved by him—three times, I think, you write—or him who has been the means of preserving you to my earnest love and tenderness. Right glad am I that you are bosom friends; but my lord should not, as he says he does, so often speak my charms upon his holy ear, nor his great manliness on mine. You say he is brave, and learned, and of such majesty of mien as well may rank him with the kings of men—of much mildness, benevolence, sobriety, chastity: the latter virtue doth become him greatly; therefore, dear lord, do not, I pray, bring strong disorder to his soul by such relation of my charms as may make him hate me for bringing down his thoughts from God. Besides, my lord, you make me too much think of him, and deem it pity that one so noble, of such esteem in all his manliness, should ever wear the monkish cowl. To you I frankly speak my thoughts, for such sweet confidence has been our golden bond of love, that I were indeed most guilty, were the heart that beats only for its lord alone, to hide one feeling from him. Thus, then, I must confess, these high descriptions of your friend Abdallah have made me so much think of him—so raised him in my love—that love which doth become a wife to feel for him who thrice has saved her husband’s life.”—

"What will she write when she learns that you have, for the fourth time, done me that good office," said the Baron, interrupting himself.

"That," continued he, reading, "were he, in the event of my dear lord falling on the fields of Palestine, to throw away the cowl and seek in these arms the sweet remembrance of his friend, and full reward for all his lengthened years of continence, most gladly and at fitting moment, would I meet my lord's desire. But this will never be. First, because Abdallah's giant arm will never shield my dear lord's life; and next, because his love for God is such, that Ernestina's charms, if ten times richer than my lord is pleased to paint them, were far too weak to wean him thence."

"Heavens, de Boiscourt!" exclaimed the Monk, grinding his teeth, and exhibiting other evidences of strong excitement, "would you destroy my peace of mind everlastingly? Alas! that letter has done it."

"Thus, she continues, pursued the Knight, who took a deep but not unfriendly delight in the confusion of his friend, whom he loved with the most unbounded tenderness—"In such, is it prudent in my lord to assail his high virtue by placing before his imagination, each separate beauty of a woman, whom the stern monastic vow forbids his ever knowing as a wife, or is it more prudent that my lord should, by such descriptions as he gives of the majesty, courage, and bearing of his noble friend, inspire in the bosom of his wife, thoughts and images of the future which never can be realized? I write these things in humble deference to my lord's opinion; but if it be his will and pleasure, as he says it is, to keep the glowing picture of those charms ever before the memory of him whom he wishes to succeed him in the nuptial rite, let him also say, that she who is thus described, loves Abdallah with a love only less than that she bears her wedded lord, and blesses him in nightly prayer, when in the solitude of stillness her thoughts but live in Palestine, even as a holy monk, superior to the frailties of humanity, and as an unconquerable warrior, who has saved to her ardent love the dear lord of her loving soul, whom to press once more within her circling arms she languishes and dies."

The Monk's lip quivered—his face was ashy pale—and there was evidently a deep struggle at his heart.

"De Boiscourt," he said solemnly, rising from his seat, "this is enough. I am undone; for, by the holy One above I swear," and he raised his arm on high, while his whole person dilated itself to the utmost, "that come what will, your wife shall be my wife."

CHAPTER III.

ORIGINALLY of Moorish origin, and abducted in infancy by the Maltese, Abdallah, or the Monk Knight, as he was ever called in Palestine, had been compelled, by his Christian captors, to abandon his religion and adopt the cowl. For more than thirty years he had exercised all the austerities of the monastic life, and this had given to his countenance that benignity of expression which has been remarked, and which had grown out of the careful tutoring of his passions. About that period, however, Jerusalem having been threatened by Saladin, Abdallah, who, although suffered to retain his name, had become as fervent a worshipper of Christ as he had once been of Mahomet, feeling within him a sort of divine inspiration to follow that course in which his services might be more actively employed in defence of the true faith, entreated and obtained permission to forsake the scene of his seclusion, and attach himself to the Knights of St. John, the strictest of the religious orders then embarked in that contest.

Here, while he distinguished himself by the prowess of his arm, rendering himself remarkable as one of the most formidable combatants who used the battle-axe and the scimitar, he practised all those austerities in which he had been brought up, and particularly and scrupulously adhered to that vow of chastity which he had pronounced on passing the threshold of the Church. This, considering the laxity of morals of the age—the temptations offered—the opportunity continually presented, was no slight manifestation of the strength of will which had thus subjected the flesh of the man to a penance that could have been little less than torture; for often amid that fierce struggle had he seen the Saracen wife—the Saracen maiden violated before his eyes, or, yielding herself up a trembling victim to her conqueror—all her rich beauties exposed to the gaze of a licentious soldiery—appearing to share with him the raptures he compelled.

It was on an occasion of this kind, that, after a trial of his virtue, under which one of less strength of mind, less confirmed in principle, had surely fallen, that he first became acquainted with the Baron de Boiscourt—an acquaintance that rapidly ripening into friendship, had now bound their hearts together in the closest ties of confidence, and led, as we have seen, to the wild desire entertained by the latter, that Abdallah should, after his death, espouse his wife. Often had he pictured to himself the overwhelming ardor with which, when pillowed on his Ernestina's bosom, the Monk would exhale his soul, while she, already disposed to receive him as her husband, when her first lord should be no more, would respond to the more than human joy, with that voluptuousness of abandonment which was so natural to her, and in a spirit of deep gratitude, and endearing love for him who had thus been careful to send her such a successor to the nuptial bed.

Returning from a successful foray near Jerusalem, one evening about sunset, the Monk Knight of St. John, fatigued with the exertions of the day—for he had with his own good right arm slaughtered many a Saracen—had given

the rein to his noble war-horse, and was pursuing his way leisurely to the camp, when his ear was suddenly arrested by the screams of women and the clattering of arms. Turning his steed in the direction of the sound, he entered a small forest of sycamores, and had not penetrated more than twenty yards, when he beheld a sight that almost petrified, and for a moment rendered him undecided whether to advance or to retire. Within a belt, formed by the sycamore also, was a large open space of about thirty feet in diameter, covered with a carpet of grass, which, shaded from the sun's beams, had preserved all its original freshness, and was, withal, so thick and velvety, that even the tread of several heavy-footed combatants, engaged in deadly strife, could not be heard. At the edge of this open space lay, with disheveled hair, clothes nearly torn from their backs, limbs unconsciously exposed, and uttering sobs that proved the violence of the unholy lust of those who had placed them in that condition, two beautiful young Saracen women—for maidens, under the circumstances, they could scarcely be called. But the eye of the warrior stayed not to linger on these, but was, as it were, irresistibly led to, and fascinated by the principal figure in this most extraordinary scene. At a few paces from the group just described, and bound, standing on naked feet, to one of the sycamores that formed the inner belt, even as Andromeda to her rock, was a third woman, of the most surpassing loveliness, whose carriage and high bearing were manifestly those of a woman of superior rank. Not a vestige of a garment was upon her, and the efforts she had made to conceal the shame with which she was oppressed by the cruel exposure of her divine beauty, were such as to show that the pang she endured at this violation of her modesty, could not have been exceeded by anything resulting from personal outrage. By loosening the cords which bound her arms, she had managed to throw her jewelled turban to the ground, and thus by untying the knot which confined her dark hair, to part and bring down its magnificent volume, over shoulders that had been formed by the god of voluptuousness himself. Her whole figure, in short, was of exquisite proportion, and without giving himself time to analyse features which it was easy to perceive were beautiful, the monk felt his heart to swell with strange and undefinable emotions, as his eye, fascinated and involuntarily riveted by the sight, feasted almost unconsciously on the voluptuous contour of the matchless form these rude ravishers had evidently brought there as their common prey.

Angry with himself for thus gazing—unreasonably indignant at the beautiful Saracen for thus carrying a strange and unaccountable trouble to his senses, Abdallah turned furiously upon the combatants. They were six in number, equally opposed, and consisted all of inferior men-at-arms. Blows rained heavily upon their gambesons, but as yet no injury had been done, when, like an avalanche, the steed of Abdallah, furiously spurred by his rider, came tumbling over them, upsetting three to the ground.

"Villains!" he thundered, "what do you here? what means this ravishment, this most unchristian and sacrilegious tumult?"

"Nay, Sir Knight," answered one of the uninjured men who appeared to be the leader of the party, "we took these women in the foray. These two, pointing to their victims, we have shared amongst us, and as there is some

difficulty in the matter of precedence with the other, we were even now deciding by battle who first should possess so sweet a creature. There was not much difficulty in the beginning, but we had no sooner undrest and bound her as you see, when the devil seemed to take possession of the whole of us, and we came at once to loggerheads."

"Unheard-of infamy—six of you burning with accursed lust for one helpless woman. Shame, shame upon you! You bring disgrace upon the very name of Crusader. Ah! how can our holy cause expect to prosper when men—fiends like these are the instruments upon which we depend for its accomplishment! Unbind that lady, miscreant—unbind her quickly—restore her garments—robe all these women, and see that you conduct them safely to the first Saracen outpost. But, mark me: if I but hear that you have failed to obey my order, or commit aught of violence more, then, by St. John, you shall die. Whom serve ye?"

"The noble Baron de Boiscourt," was the sullen reply.

"Then take heed of it," cautioned the knight as, not venturing to turn his eyes in the direction of the bound Saracen women, he wheeled round his horse, and galloped from the scene of meditated murder and partially accomplished lust. He had not, however, ridden a hundred yards beyond the inner belt of sycamores, when it suddenly occurred to him that, freed from the restraint of his presence, the villains might, in the certainty of his ignorance of the ultimate fate of the women, carry out their original diabolical design. Thoroughly impressed, as he now became with this idea, he walked his steed cautiously back, and had again nearly reached the area he had so recently quitted, when a succession of shrieks met his ear so piercing, and yet so full of melancholy, that his whole frame thrilled with indignant emotion. He dashed forward anticipating the worst, and soon beheld a sight that stirred up his spirit to the fiercest anger.

The beautiful Saracen had been unbound, but was totally naked as before, Close to the spot where she had stood was a small mound-like acclivity covered with rich soft grass, on which she lay extended sobbing violently, and with her black and luxuriant hair floating over her neck and bosom, and held down by her delicate hands. Poor was the defence. Two men were even then in the act of forcing back her arms, while two others held down her moulded and polished feet. The man to whom the Monk Knight had addressed himself, had doffed his gambeson, and the deepest concentration of savage and unpitied lust gloated in the flushed cheeks and fiery eyes of all the others, who, like himself, had thrown away their skull-caps. The brute, with long, coarse black locks, overshadowing a countenance, in which sensuality was strongly depicted, had recommenced his brutal assault upon the now utterly defenceless victim, with the most palpable recklessness of consequences, and regardless of her renewed screams and vain efforts to release herself, when suddenly a sharp smooth sound met his ear, and then two heads fell under his very eyes to the ground, saturating not only his own hideous face, but slightly sprinkling the bosom of his victim with their blood.

But guilty passion, when once excited to its utmost pitch, has no fear. The ruffian knew, without seeing him, that the knight was returned. He was sensible that the ghastly heads lying before him had been sacrificed

by his scimitar—that his own turn would be next—that he must die. Why he had not yet been slain he could not tell, but if he could only fully satisfy his desire before he died, then were death to him a thing of no moment. Fired to madness by her charms, he redoubled his efforts—another minute and the struggling and deeply flushed woman was lost, when, as she uttered a last scream, calling on Heaven for assistance, she felt his loathsome weight suddenly removed, heard a distant crash, blended with a groan of agony, and then exhausted with her emotions, closed her eyes languidly, and lay for some moments as if dead.

The timely succour she had received, the sounds she had heard, had been in truth the work of the Monk Knight. For a few minutes after striking off the heads of the associates of the ravisher, he had gazed on the strange scene before him with the most indescribable emotions, but no sooner had the last agonizing cry of the Saracen captive reached his ear, than recovering his self-possession, Abdallah seized the violator by his garments with one hand, and the back of his bushy hair with the other, then, raising him with great force until he brought him to a level with his own chest, he hurled him with violence against the trunk of a large sycamore tree, a few paces from him, and dashed out his brains.

What a scene was thus presented! On either side of the insensible and naked Saracen, lay the bleeding heads and bodies of those whose office it had been to prevent successful resistance to the designs of their leader. A little beyond that was the corpse of the wretch himself, and farther on in the back ground, and now in the act of slowly rising and resuming their garments, which lay near them, were the two young girls, whose shrieks of agony had first drawn the attention of the Monk to the spot. Never had his blood circulated more quickly in his veins. Oppressed with a sense of suffocation, he unbuckled his helmet, and threw it upon the sward, disclosing in the act the whole of his manly, noble and benevolent features. Then, addressing the girls in the Moorish language, he bade them gather up the clothes of their mistress, and hasten to cover her.

The sound of her own language in that spot, seemed to arouse the Saracen lady from her stupor. She slowly opened her eyes, raised herself upon her elbows, and, shuddering at the sight of the blood which everywhere encompassed her, gained her feet, and approaching with tottering steps the bewildered and pallid Monk, threw herself upon his harnessed chest, and, as far as his great height would permit, clasped her beautiful arms round his neck.

Startled by the act, Abdallah drew suddenly back. "Woman, leave me," he cried, in the Moorish tongue; "I have saved you from the pollution of the body; let not the pollution of the soul be my reward. Slaves," he imperatively exclaimed to the other women, "do my bidding. Approach, and clothe your mistress."

The attendants, now habited in the light costume in which they had been dragged at early morning from their beds, not knowing whether they should not be subjected to a repetition of the previous outrage, approached tremblingly to execute his will, when, bowing herself humbly, and with an air of deep dejection, their mistress withdrew a few paces, her beautiful

countenance expressing deep sorrow and mortification, that the fervent offering of her heart's gratitude should thus have been rejected.

There was more danger to the virtue of the Monk in this retiring and modest act, than if she had overwhelmed him with caresses. His heart now smote him for his seeming cruelty to one who appeared destined to suffer. His interest, at each moment, became more and more awakened in her favor. Insensibly his feelings assumed a tumultuous character. Wild thoughts, with lightning speed, flashed through his mind, and threatened him with mastery. His brain was dizzy with the contemplation of the glowing and suppliant beauty before him. For the first time his monastic vows were forgotten. He saw and confessed the majesty of God in one of the most perfect of His creatures. The whole of the strange scene which had so recently occurred, came forcibly again to his memory; he saw but the woman. She was the talisman which enchained his soul. He made a movement with trembling steps, when, suddenly, the image of the devil, grinning fiendishly and exultingly, seemed to him to interpose itself. A moment he paused, but the temptation was beyond his sorely tried strength to resist; another moment, and he was lost, when, suddenly, the sounds of a horse's hoofs near at hand recalled him to himself.

CHAPTER IV.

TURNING suddenly to behold the intruder, Abdallah saw issuing from the body of the wood into the enclosure, a knight, whose costume, and the particular plume he wore in his helmet, proved to be a noble of France, one, moreover, whom he had, though a personal stranger to him, frequently remarked for his gallant bearing in the field, as well as for the enthusiastic ardor with which he entered on every enterprise of peril.

"Ha!" exclaimed the new-comer, as he dismounted, and, like Abdallah, unbuckled his helmet, and dashed it on the soft green turf: "what a charming scene of love and murder have we here!—What! a knight of St. John, with his sword nearly stained to the hilt in blood! a knight of the most holy order—the most strict in virtue of our array, and alone, and with a naked and beautiful daughter of Mahomet, after having evidently cut the throats of these varlets. Ha! by my faith, what do I behold! By the Holy Virgin but they are my own followers. There is that libidinous wretch Thibaud, with the little brains he ever possessed dashed into a jelly; Sancerre, Guillaume, Benoit, Prudhomme, Fredain, their heads all bodiless, and their features looking little less horrible in death, than they did in life. Pray, Sir Knight," and he looked and smiled courteously as he spoke; "am I right in connecting that dripping falchion with those headless rascals of mine? But, before I question further, permit me to ask if that very charming infidel, whose graces of person a good deal remind me of a certain fair one I have left in Auvergne, is your especial

captive? If she be, then, by St. Paul, but these sly Knights of St. John are, albeit their vows of continence, not bad judges of the sex. Ha!"

At that moment the subject of his remark, who had now been partially dressed by her women, attracted by the sound of a new voice, looked up, and with so tender and anxious an expression of countenance, that the young Knight, suddenly interrupting himself flew to her side, and falling on one knee, seized and imprinted a kiss upon her small and delicately formed hand. So soothing was this act of kindness and interest to the oppressed soul of the unhappy woman, that, with generous impulse, she threw herself this time with more success upon the shoulder of the handsome Knight, and shedding tears of joy and gratitude, suffered his arm to encircle her, until their beating hearts seemed to grow together; then, when the paroxysm of her feeling had passed away, she raised her head, smiled upon him, and amused herself with passing her fingers through the rich clusters of his wavy hair. It was strange that so warm a feeling should have been so suddenly induced, yet it seemed as if in these few moments they had lived a life of intimacy, and the flushing cheek, and flashing eye, and beating heart of the young Knight spoke a language which could never be mistaken by her. Again she sank her head, her rich dark cheek reposing on his neck, and her raven and luxuriant hair sweeping over his face and mingling with his own.

"Sir Knight," said the Monk, somewhat sternly, and approaching him, "by what you have stated, I know you for the Baron de Boiscourt—a noble name, and one which should not be disgraced. For what *they* would have offered of violence to this lady I slew those villains, but not to pander to the appetite of their master."

The interruption was not ill-timed. Carried away by the impetuosity of their newly-awakened feelings, the Saracen lady and the Christian knight had forgotten that there was aught beside themselves within that seeming solitude.

The young knight rose to confront the intruder, after having gently deposited his fair burden upon the velvet sward.

"Sir Knight of St. John," he asked somewhat haughtily, "I crave to know whether this lady be *your* captive; my course shall fashion itself on your reply."

"If the act of saving that lady from the brutal lust of the men-at-arms of the Baron de Boiscourt, can give such right, I claim it," was the calm rejoinder of the Monk." And, in a few brief words he explained all that had occurred.

"My hand in yours upon this holy deed," exclaimed the latter. "It was that shriek which brought me here, little thinking that it had been wrung from those beauteous lips, by the very scoundrels I was in pursuit of to punish for their absence from the ranks. Right well have you done. These knaves were a graceless set—the worst of my retainers, and good service have you rendered me in dispatching them. Pledge me, brave Knight, in holiest friendship from this hour, for you have, even now, saved me from much weakness and greater wrong. Shame, as you say, that the master should acknowledge the same wild impulse with the slave!"

"I accept and acknowledge the pledge," solemnly remarked the Monk, "not so much in earnest of what has now occurred, as that I long have marked you as one of the bravest and most gallant knights of France."

"Then, shall we never more be unknown," exclaimed the Baron, as he warmly grasped his hand. "Henceforth my tent and heart are yours. But the evening wanes. What shall be done with this our most unwilling charge? It is now too late to bear them to their lines, and it will not do to leave them wanderers by the way, lest worse than this befall them."

"You are right, Sir Baron. Protection for the night we must afford. Within your tent the lady must repose till early dawn, and then, when the whole camp are wrapped in sleep, save the tired sentinels, we can sally forth and bear them safely to the lines of Saladin."

"And the poor deflowered maidens, where shall they find shelter?" asked the younger knight.

"Even in my own tent," said the Monk. "Nay," he continued, calmly, and with an air of the most imposing dignity, "when you know your friend Abdallah better, you will spare those meaning smiles. They shall lie in my humble tent, while I pass the night in watchfulness in yours."

"But why in watchfulness in mine," eagerly returned the French knight. "Surely you will not leave these hapless maidens thus exposed."

"To see the tempter enters not the portal to defile it," was the solemn reply.

"Then be it so," remarked the Baron; "and now for the manner of our march. These damsels cannot walk, and as yours is the noblest steed, Sir Monk, you shall bear the noble lady on your crupper, who, enfolding her sweet arms around your stalwart form, shall thus preserve her seat, while I follow with her maidens where your monkship leads."

"Not so," replied Abdallah, quickly, and paling as he spoke. "The lady must with you, Sir Baron. I am sworn to sternest vows of church, and thus to be in contact with a woman might cast deep peril on my soul."

"That is to say," observed the Baron, with levity, "you would not prove unfaithful to the church."

"God forbid," ejaculated the Monk. "I would not again be beset by the devilish temptation that assailed me at the moment of your coming for all that earth contains. To him who has my friendship," he continued, solemnly and laying his hand upon the shoulder of the young knight, "I yield my fullest confidence. The woman, alone, was then before my eyes. The stifled passions of a long life were battling against the open prayers of forty years, and, but for your timely arrival, I was lost. I felt that I was fast yielding before the tempter, Satan, arrayed in the enchanting form which had so nearly subdued yourself. Think you, then, I would a second time incur the fearful risk her nearer presence would entail?"

"You are right," said the Baron, who had half expected an objection so little distasteful to himself. "Devoted as you are to the monastic vow, it were unwise to court this danger to your peace. With me it is different. I have entered into no compact with the church, which cannot be broken, and the mere presence of a woman can impart no guilt unto my soul. The Sar

seen lady shall ride before me, and her hand-maidens must walk the gentle pace we take."

"But mark they array themselves in the dress of those ruffians, returned the Monk. "Should we enter the camp with them in their own attire, not only should we suffer in our reputation, but there would be danger to themselves. The licentious soldiery would quickly bear them from our sight."

"You say right, again, my soundly-judging friend," replied the Baron. "Twas yours the task to slay those wretches: be it mine to strip them of the garb they have disgraced."

So saying, he approached the fast-stiffening bodies of his men, and selecting two of the smallest in form and stature, proceeded to divest them of their clothing. The young Saracen girls, while clinging round their mistresses, had watched the whole of the occurrences, from the moment of the last arrival of Abdallah, with the most intense interest, and they now shrank back affrighted, as the younger knight gave them to understand, by signs, that they were to place the bloody dresses of their ravishers over their own. They did not seem to comprehend what was meant, until the Monk explained to them, in brief terms, that the step they were now taking was necessary to their preservation from further outrage.

"And how mean you to dispose of the lady?" asked the Monk, perceiving that his friend had finished stripping the bodies. "Her garments will surely be observed, and what may not such a sight produce among our turbulent men at arms?"

"Here is her safeguard," answered the Baron, gaily, as he unstrapped from the back of his high-peaked saddle an ample cloak of rich dark velvet, and threw it around the voluptuous and nearly naked form of the trembling Saracen. "Beneath this, and with one of those head-pieces thrown over the turban, I defy Satan himself to recognize that which he seems to have sent for the temptation of us all. It must be confessed," he pursued, in an under tone, and half sighing, "that rascal Thibaud was not without some shadow of excuse for what he did."

"This will do," said the Monk, as the attendants, who had previously retired to the skirt of the wood, to cover themselves with a clothing which they abhorred, now appeared timidly before him, "but the gambesons must be borne by them also. They will suffer a little beneath the unusual weight, it is true, but better that than a repetition of what has already befallen them. Nay, more than this; they must bear the weapons of the dead. None then will take them for other than your own men-at-arms."

Both knights had now replaced their helmets. The younger raised himself into the saddle, and sat ready to receive his fair burden, over whose turbaned brow had been placed the head-piece of the very man from whose fierce and indomitable lust she had been so opportunely rescued by Abdallah. She stood at the horse's head, wrapped in the cloak, and looked upwards in supplication, as though she feared the rider would go without her.

"Raise her to my saddle-bow," said the latter, addressing the Monk—"raise her gently to her seat. Now that the cloak is removed, there is plenty of room for both in the hollow of the saddle."

"And *must* I touch her," murmured the Monk: "must these hands come in contact with her form?"

"By my faith," said de Boiscourt, laughing outright, "but I know no other means by which she can get there, unless, indeed, you can lend her the wings of faith to aid her in her flight."

With a violent effort at composure, Abdallah placed both his palms under the arms of the Saracen, and raised her to the saddle. The cloak had parted in front while in the act of doing so, and as he drew away his hands rapidly, nay, almost with a feeling of loathing, they brushed lightly against her magnificent, unconfined, and glowing bosom; instinctively, and without being sensible of the act, the Monk pressed that beauty wildly in his trembling hands: but no sooner had he done so, than he felt one of them grasped, and a fervent kiss of gratitude imprinted on it by lips that were moist and fragrant as the very dews that were fast gathering around them.

Fated Abdallah! Who shall rob the touch of what it once has known, racking the brain with such wild fever of recollection, that to repeat the maddening act, the sternest monk that ever tore his flesh with thongs, would forfeit all of hope hereafter. That touch was thine, Abdallah! What first thy much-bewildered eye had seen, thy monkish hand caressed. True, but for a moment; but in that moment thou hadst lived a life of knowledge. What God-created charms! Ah, what a world of memory was there! It was the triumph of nature over art—of truth over falsehood—of a hallowed and divine sentiment, over the cold and abstract conventionalisms of a world which, child-like, forges its own chains, fetters its own limbs, and glories in the display of its own bondage.

CHAPTER V.

For some minutes, Abdallah remained absorbed in the feelings which seemed almost to convulse his frame, but perceiving that his strong emotion was remarked by the French knight, who, after having secured the cloak around his charge, was now preparing to depart, he made an effort at self-command, and raised himself heavily to his saddle.

The sun had long gone down, and the shades of twilight had merged into darkness. Their course through the sycamore grove was difficult to trace, but as they emerged into the open plain, the outline of objects was clearly discernible. The younger knight was in front. A few yards behind him walked the attendants of the fair Saracen, habited as has been seen, while at an equal distance rode Abdallah, the whole moving at a pace that was necessarily slow.

In spite of himself, in spite of the determination he had formed, to impose the most severe self-denial upon his feelings, the Monk could not distract his attention from the outline of the figure of de Boiscourt, before whom rode the fascinating and voluptuous infidel who had raised such a tempest in his

soul. Clouds were passing in the heavens. The moon, then in her infancy, appeared only at intervals through the fitting vapor, now suddenly illuminating everything around, and then as rapidly shadowing with darkness. Looking attentively, during one of these fitful gleams, he perceived that the Baron had removed his helmet, which now hung from his saddle-bow, and that he was bending his head, his beautiful hair hanging over his shoulders, low over the figure which his arms encircled. Once or twice he started, as he fancied he heard the sound of human lips, meeting and parting in an intensity of tenderness; and, as his but too vivid recollection traced all the outline of the gorgeous beauty which lay within the full grasp of the young knight's daring hand, he experienced a burning heat within his veins, that stung him with impatience to reach the camp.

At length, about midnight, they arrived. All was still. The groups that, a few hours before, had thronged each avenue of the vast enclosure in revelry and amusement, were now steeped in repose—all save the watchful sentinels, who vigilantly guarded the approaches. The pass-word was given. The women were mistaken for attendants of the Baron, and in a few minutes the little party stood before the entrance to the rude tent of the Monk Knight, which, strongly in contrast with that of the Baron de Boiscourt, was barely furnished with the absolute necessities of life.

"Better dismount here," said the Baron, as Abdallah quitted his saddle. "We shall, with the greater ease and freedom from interruption, gain my tent. I pray you my holy friend, once more relieve me of my charge."

But the Monk had now armed himself with that virtue which for a moment, but in thought alone, had yielded to the tempter. A sudden revulsion of feeling had come over him. He almost loathed himself for the momentary weakness that had beset his soul.

"That office best may suit one of the lady's handmaidens," he replied, rather sternly: "what holy knight may do, surely I have done. An arm of strength it needed to exalt her in reach of the lesson thou hast doubtless taught her, de Boiscourt, but now a child may lead her thence. Lend your mistress aid," he concluded, in Moorish, to one of the attendants.

The girl did as directed, and the fair Saracen, putting her hands upon her shoulders, leaped lightly to the ground. But the trial of Abdallah's virtue was not yet at an end. As she alighted, the loose cloak, entangled in the peak of the saddle, was left behind, and the bosom of her tunic, evidently displaced during the ride, again exhibited in the moonlight to his unwilling view, the most gorgeous of female charms.

"Imprudent!" he exclaimed, sternly, in Moorish, as he advanced, disengaged the cloak, and threw it over her half-naked form. "If you have no consideration for others, have at least regard for your own safety; let but some prowling eye—some straggler of the camp—behold that womanhood, and nothing will arrest the fate from which you have once been rescued."

"You have given me more than life; you have saved me from the outrage of those horrid men," she answered, in the same tongue, and in a voice whose every note was sweetness. "Ah! I would not incur that risk again, even to mingle with the Houris and to share their bliss;—accept, then, my gratitude. Spurn me not away. Let me kneel and thank you."

She fell at his feet. Again she caught his hands, imprinted a kiss upon them, and before he had time to prevent her, or even to anticipate the action, pressed them tenderly upon her glowing and heaving bosom.

"Nay, this weakness must not be," he said, as, stifling his emotion, he withdrew his hands, almost violently, and strode towards a smaller tent that stood immediately behind his own, and in which reposed the man-at-arms who usually took charge of his steed. Returning the next moment, he cautioned the French Knight to keep the cloak closely folded around the person of the lady, lest the man whom he had awakened, and who was now approaching, should notice her, and thus, by possibility, commit him with his Order.

"Fear me not, brave Monk," replied the Baron to his caution: "no indiscretion shall be mine: but, the better to favor our approach to my own tent, let both our steeds remain here. It is but to feed and keep them saddled for early dawn, when we can again prepare us for our journey."

"Justly remarked," said Abdallah; "retire within the shadow of the tent with your women," he continued in Moorish, to the Saracen lady, "some one comes."

The man, half asleep, and too stupid to notice anything beyond the mere mechanical duty required of him, now came up, and after having received the orders of Abdallah, withdrew with the chargers to the front of his own tent, which looked in an opposite direction. As soon as he was out of sight, the Monk entered his own, and having lighted his rude lamp, pointed out to the two waiting-women the humble couch they were to occupy until called for at early dawn. He then gave to each a piece of brown bread and a bunch of grapes, and after having placed a pitcher of water by their couch, bade them lie down; desiring them on no account to stir, until he should come in person to call them. He then extinguished the light, and moved to the entrance of the tent, where the Baron stood in careless attitude, shielding the now closely-cloaked Saracen in his embrace. They all then proceeded in that direction of the Christian camp in which the latter had hoisted his pennon.

Owing to the precaution of de Boiscourt in leaving his steed behind, there was no sound created in their progress, which could disturb the sleeping thousands that surrounded them, so that little more than a quarter of an hour had elapsed before they found themselves at the entrance of the gaily ornamented tent of the young French Knight. There they were met by the handsome page, who had been anxiously awaiting his lord's return, and who expressed the most affectionate concern lest some accident should have occurred to detain him so late. He was aware that he had not fallen, or even been hurt, in the morning's foray, for he had been constantly at his side; but having suddenly lost sight of him in the evening, and when the battle was over, he had been led to apprehend that some straggling band of the discomfited enemy, might have fallen in with and made him their captive.

"And so, my gentle boy, I was a captive to the Saracen," said the Baron, after having heard from Rudolph the little history of the fears he had entertained—"but all that you shall learn later. Meanwhile," and he removed the head-piece, the turban of the beautiful infidel—"conduct the captivete

my inner tent—give her of Cyprus wine, and those figs of Aescalon, which melt like liquid amber in the mouth. Nay, Rudolph, fie—fix not those blue and earnest eyes upon her thus, for see how the blood mantles on her cheek—else how will you ever find calmness to array her—as array her you must—in one of your plainest battle-suits. Nay, look not surprised, my Rudolph. 'Tis even so. At dawn we must away again; this lady as my page. Yet say to none on earth that the ripened beauty of a glowing infidel has past the portal of a Christian knight; still less, that a holy monk of the austere brotherhood of St. John—henceforth, mark you, boy, your master's plighted friend—has lent his aid and sanction to conduct her here."

"Your word is law—all of secrecy is mine, my gracious lord," replied the youth earnestly, yet coloring deeply as he saw the eyes of the beautiful Saracen turned upon him with a tenderness of expression which denoted curiosity and interest, that one so youthful, so delicate, should be found amid the hosts of battle, and a sharer in all those scenes of blood, which, under the garb of religion, were even then devastating the fair soil of Palestine. She seemed to say to herself, "Ah, if he has a mother—if he has sisters, how must they bewail his absence, and count the days until his return!"

"If the lady will permit me," said the blushing boy, with a hesitating manner, as he offered her his hand, to conduct her to the inner tent.

Evidently not comprehending the motive of this action, the Saracen held out her own hand, took his, and affectionately pressed it as a mother would that of her son.

Abdallah explained to her, in Moorish, that after having taken a few hours repose on the couch whither the boy would lead her, she was to be inducted in one of his suits, as a better means of security in her departure from the camp.

With a look expressive of deep gratitude, the beautiful woman caught, at the same moment, the hand of the Monk and that of the younger Knight, and pressing them gracefully to her bosom, sought to demonstrate, by that act, the deep sense she entertained of all that had been done for her. She then, conducted by Rudolph, withdrew into the remoter part of the capacious tent.

"Fail not, boy, when you have disposed of your charge," said the light-hearted de Boiscourt, "to bring us lights, food, and a couple of flasks of Cyprus wine; and, hear me, youngster," he added, smiling, "the temptation to linger is strong, but be not too tardy in lulling her to sleep."

"Is not that strange language to use to so mere a child?" questioned the Monk Knight, somewhat reproachfully, when they were alone.

The Baron smiled. "There is little to be said or taught to Rudolph," he replied gaily. He has ever been the pet of such noble Saracen dames as the fortune of battle has thrown into our hands; and, by my faith, he is not one to neglect improving an occasion."

Abdallah raised his eyes in astonishment. "So young, so beautiful, and yet so hardened in sin!" he ejaculated. "Of a verity, the Christian camp has that within its limits, that well may lead us to despair of the eventual success of our cause. No!" he continued, emphatically, "I prophecy that,

notwithstanding all the blood that has been shed—all that will be shed for the extinction of Moslemism, and the propagation of the true faith, we shall never firmly establish the cross in Palestine. Heaven chooses not such agents to accomplish its ends. Murder, rapine and unholy lust are not the means by which its will is to be effected. Mark my words, Sir Baron!" and the usually calm and benignant expression of his noble countenance became clouded as he spoke—"either a strange revolution must take place in the moral condition of the Crusaders, or we shall return to Europe with ignominy and disgrace. Not all the virtue of the holy Urban himself can avert this."

"You speak like an oracle, my noble Monk," returned the Baron, seriously. "By my troth, but I half incline myself to believe that your prediction will prove correct. It must be confessed that, with the trifling difference in their favor, that they have almost a new wife for every month in the year these infidel dogs beat us hollow in the practice of morality."

"And their plurality of wives," remarked the Monk, gravely, "is, you know, permitted by their religion; therefore there is no infringement of a moral law."

"What a delicious idea!" resumed the gay and imaginative Baron—"that of being nursed in the lap of so many loves—the dark, the fair—the short, the tall—the voluptuous, the graceful—the tender, the impassioned. By my troth, had I not espoused the most beautiful, the most enchanting woman in the whole world—one who has no equal but in heaven—I could find it in my heart to embrace Moslemism, and take my fill of their Houris both here and hereafter. Ha! that graceless boy! Did you hear?"

The young Knight had been interrupted in his remarks by sounds that seemed to him to partake of the mixed character of murmurs and sighs, several times gently repeated, from the interior of the tent.

"What mean you?" asked Abdallah, with an air of surprise; "I heard nothing."

"I was deceived," continued de Boiscourt, not desiring that the attention of his new and severe friend should be directed to what he had involuntarily noticed aloud. "Rudolph, you have forgotten the wine."

In the course of a few seconds, the page made his appearance with a lamp newly trimmed, and a small basket, containing some cold refreshments, fruits, and a couple of osier-covered flasks of Cyprus wine, which he deposited on the low table at which the friends were already seated. His face was flushed. The Baron, without making any remark, looked at him attentively. This caused the boy to blush even more.

"How fares your charge, my Ganymede?" inquired the young Knight, playfully, and in a tone designed to set the boy at his ease.

"~~She reclines on my lord's couch,~~" answered Rudolph, "and in the ample cloak in which she came."

"You have not, then, habited her in her page's attire? Did your young heart fail you in the attempt?"

"I signed to her that I was ready to assist her," returned the still blushing boy, "but she, in the same manner, gave me to understand that she would sleep first, and change afterwards."

"Did you give her wine?" pursued the Baron, maliciously. "I am sure of her having tasted the grape, for I thought her lips marked how agreeably she relished its flavor."

Rudolph remarked that the Baron's eyes were intently, but not harshly, fixed upon him, and he colored to the very brow. Abdallah had not noticed anything particular in the matter.

"I gave what my lord desired," said the Page, with a deprecating look and manner.

"Dear Rudolph," resumed the young Knight, "drink of my cup and retire—you have need of rest—your cheek betrays the excitement of fatigue and long watching, and you know you must be up betimes. When the hour is near I shall call you. Disturb not the stranger lady until then; but, lest she should require aught in the intervening hours, spread my lion's skin near the couch, and place yourself at her side."

While draining off the wine, the boy looked at the Knight, as though he did not quite understand him. "Good night, sweet Rudolph," said the latter, taking and pressing his hand. "Make the most of the few hours that are given you," he added, significantly. "Myself and this holy Knight will keep watch for the dawn."

Again the eye of the page caught that of the Baron. The expression brought him at once to his knees. He kissed the hand that was extended to him, and again rising, with a countenance radiant with expression, retired to his humble couch.

CHAPTER VI.

It wanted about an hour of dawn. The Baron and Abdallah, who never refused his wine in moderation, had finished the two flasks brought in by the page, and the latter, overcome not more by the fatigues of the day, than by the violent but concealed passion, over which, however, he had finally gained the victory, was reclining in his seat, calmly, but profoundly asleep.

The hour, the opportunity, were tempting. A gentle and voluptuous feeling suddenly stole over the heart of de Boiscourt. He knew where Rudolph was. He had heard the same subdued sighs and murmurs since the return of the beautiful boy, and now he adopted a wild resolution. Cautiously he approached the curtain which divided the two portions of the tent. A lamp was burning faintly in the distance, the light evidently screened, but still there was sufficient to throw ~~into full relief the several~~ objects around. The lion's skin was spread out upon the floor, but there was no one extended on it. He raised his glance to the couch beyond, and beheld, as he had expected to see, the blooming youth pillowed on the bosom of his charge. The outline of their forms was distinctly marked. She was robed simply in the white tunic she had resumed in the morning, but this, disordered and loose, only heightened the effect of her powerful beauty.

Her attitude was one of perfect abandonment. Her long, thick, dark hair was unconfined. One moulded arm was thrown, with the protecting fondness of a mother, around the neck of the boy, and while her rich, ripe, red lips were poutingly pressed to his, the other was thrown carelessly over his back. They were perfectly motionless. The group was worthy of the chisel of the sculptor.

The Baron dropped the curtain he had partially raised, and retired a step or two, intending to call out to the page from the seat he had just quitted, at the side of the Monk. But when he reflected that the sound of his voice would awaken Abdallah, he again advanced, passed into the inner tent, and tapping the boy on the shoulder, caused him to spring, with something like terror, from the arms that still fondly encircled him.

"Rudolph," said his master, gently, "go forth instantly to the tent of my friend, the Monk Knight of St. John, which you will find at the extreme corner of the north-east division of the encampment. There is another and smaller one beside it. At the entrance of the latter, you will see two steeds all ready for mounting, and held by the drowsy retainer of the Knight. You know the fiery Belœil well; he is one of them. You will mount him and lead the other."

"And when I have brought the horses, my lord?" inquiringly remarked the boy.

"You will tarry silently at the door of my tent until we join you."

"And the lady?" ventured the page, with some hesitation. "Who is to robe her for the journey, my lord?"

"That shall be my care, considerate Rudolph," replied the Baron archly, as he patted his head affectionately. "First point me out the clothes you intend for her. Ah, there! 'tis well. And now go; but as you move through the tent, mark well," and he looked significantly, "that you do not awaken the Monk. He sleeps fatigued, and must not be disturbed."

As the page passed through the curtain, the Baron followed him with his eye to see if he in any way attracted the attention of the sleeper. His tread was subdued, and he gained the entrance of the tent without disturbing Abdallah. What a volcano of passion was now at the heart of de Boisecourt. He knelt at the side of the beautiful Saracen. Her breathing was deep—impassioned; it carried consciousness of the presence of one who could call forth its more generous impulses. Gradually he stole an arm around her moulded form—one hand pressed her polished and heaving bosom, which absolutely bounded beneath his first touch; the other madly weaved and clenched itself in her long and clustering hair. Ah! where was the Lady Ernestina? Even then, strange as it may seem to the novice in the wild imaginings of the human heart, she was uppermost in the thoughts of the fiery and voluptuous de Boisecourt—the fondly-cherished husband of her long-widowed love. The rich and parted lips of the Saracen met his, and a thousand fires consumed their souls. He stopped the murmured sighs of guilty transport she would have uttered, and the intensity of bliss was upon their willing hearts. Ah, how different that voluptuous woman now from what she had been a few hours earlier, when subject to the will of the brutal Thibaud.

"Love, love—divine and mystic love—thou richest, rarest attribute of wo-

man, who can resist thy enthrallments, when presented in such a shape!" muttered de Boiscourt fiercely, through his closed teeth:—"Ernestina, my beloved Ernestina, forgive the adoring husband who thinks only of thee while in the arms of one of whom Mahomet alone is worthy—sweet, sweet Ernestina, receive my soul."

Guilty, guilty de Boiscourt!—doubly guilty in this, that thou hadst not only violated the sanctity of hospitality, but forfeited thy implied pledge to thy friend—that holy warrior Monk, whose very presence under thy knightly roof, gave tenfold sin unto the deed; and yet thy wrong was not without a stern, reproving but pitying witness.

Lost in the wild tumult of their excited feelings, the guilty pair thought not of Abdallah, who had awakened from his restless and uneasy slumber, and finding the young Knight absent from his side, could not doubt, novice even as he was, that the ardent and impetuous youth had weakly yielded to the sorcery of the beauty of the infidel. But if so, where was Rudolph? Surely some remnant of shame would prevent him from availing himself of her evident partiality for him, in presence of the boy. To assure himself that his surmise was incorrect, and that the sounds proceeded merely from causes connected with her change of raiment, he slowly approached the curtain. Gently he raised one corner, and stood almost transfixed with confusion at what he beheld. There was now no doubting the evidence of his senses. Rudolph was nowhere to be seen, but on the broad velvet couch, and faintly revealed in the dim light which burned in the distance, he saw the lady and the Knight fast locked in each other's arms. Abdallah felt the blood to ebb and flow within his veins with a violence that threatened to destroy him. Quickly he dropped the curtain, pressed his hands to his aching brow, and sank upon his knees, praying silently, but fervently, that some dreadful scourge might not fall upon the Christian camp, as a punishment for so great a sin. Somewhat relieved by this prayer, he rose, moved back to the seat he had just left, and mused deeply. For the first time, the veil had fallen from before his eyes, the sealed book of God's holiest mystery had been fully opened to him.

An hour had passed away since the handsome de Boiscourt first entered that more retired portion of his tent. The Saracen had risen, and having with his assistance completed her page's toilet, and now lingered for the signal of departure. The young Knight, after bestowing upon her the most passionate caresses, sought to rejoin his friend, who he was apprehensive might awaken and remark his absence. Before leaving, however, he poured out and offered to her a small tankard of Cyprus wine, and some deliciously perfumed grapes, to cool the fever of excitement in her veins, and to strengthen her for her journey. She merely tasted of these, and as he turned to leave her, put them aside, and sank upon her knees at his feet. Her arms embraced his legs. Her head was bowed down, and her loose and luxuriant hair completely enveloped his feet. She shed a torrent of tears, and deep sobs came from her bosom. When she had given full vent to these, she pointed to the dress in which she had been habited, and gave him to comprehend, by signs not to be mistaken, that she would gladly retain the garb, and serve him as a page forever. The heart of the Baron was full of emotion, but

alas, this could not be done. Had he not made the acquaintance of the Monk, and exchanged with him vows of eternal confidence and friendship, his warm and generous heart never could have withstood the appeal, and running all risks to himself, he would have joyfully yielded to her proposal. But as it was, and after the pledge which had been given—(he little suspected that the Monk was cognizant of its violation)—it was impossible that, without self-degradation as a Christian knight, he could retain, even as his page, an infidel, whose very presence was an outrage upon the holy principles and feelings of the noble-minded and confiding Monk of St. John.

Still, full of tender sympathy for her, he raised her gently up, and by answering signs, gave her to understand that this was impossible—that painful as it must prove to both, they must part. He, however, took a brilliant ring from his finger, and, after carrying it to his lips, placed it on her beautiful hand. Gratified by this act, she at once followed his example, (for, in the anxiety of their gross and brutal lust for her, the ruffians who had violated her attendants, had not even thought of dispossessing her of her jewels), moistened it with her still trickling tears, and placed it on the little finger of de Boiscourt's left hand. Then, throwing her moulded arms around his neck, and passionately pressing her ripe lips to his, she left there the last outpourings of the deep passion he had infused into her.

Again the young Knight sat on the chair he had occupied opposite to the Monk, who still seemed to sleep profoundly, and a half sentiment of exultation crept over de Boiscourt's heart, as he thought of the successful manner in which he had deceived him; not that it must be inferred his was a nature that could take pleasure in the mere fact of deceit itself, but, because it was voluptuously soothing to him to reflect that the recollection of what had taken place would be unembittered, not only by the silent but just reproaches of his friend, but even by his knowledge of what had occurred between himself and his fascinating charge. Their secret, he thought, was their own. No human being could attest against them.

The moments flew rapidly by. The faint approach of dawn was perceptible, and it was necessary, if they would avoid trouble, to depart immediately.

"Gallant Monk, you sleep soundly," remarked de Boiscourt, as he gently touched the shoulder of Abdallah. "What with the soothing grape of Cyprus, and the fatigue of cutting off so many heads, not only Saracen but Christian, you have well won your claim to repose. But it is time we were stirring. I have dispatched Rudolph to your tent for our steeds."

"And thy infidel par—the Saracen lady," said the Monk, correcting himself, and with a mild and searching look.

"Is doubtless dressed by this time in the attire left her by Rudolph." As he uttered these brief words, de Boiscourt's cheek flushed half in recollection of the more than human bliss of which he had tasted, half in shame for the enormity of which he was conscious.

He again approached, and drew aside the curtain, but fearing lest some new and strong demonstration of the Saracen lady's feelings should be overheard by the Monk, he passed not beyond, but motioned with his hand for her to come forth.

Pensive and thoughtful, she slowly rose to obey him. The Baron took

her hand, led her forth and to the side of his friend. Her step was timid, for she felt all a woman's modesty in appearing in the garb of a man, and the consciousness of this had given a glow to her cheek, which lent even greater interest to her appearance than before, and when in her own costume.

For a moment or two the Monk looked at her seriously, but with that mild benevolence of expression which so usually pervaded his noble features. Once his lips were opened to tell her, in Moorish, of his knowledge of the great crime she had committed, and gently to reprove her for it; but there was such an expression of subdued sorrow on her sweet countenance, even amid all the rich color which suffused it, that, sensible of the cause, and unwilling to give her farther pain, now the past was without recall, he checked the impulse, and rising from his seat, replaced his helmet and resumed the weapons that had been thrown aside. De Boiscourt followed his example, and at that moment the low tramping of horses' feet announced the arrival of Rudolph.

De Boiscourt was the first to mount, when Abdallah, knowing that all danger to himself was past, and feeling moreover a partial sentiment of pity and regret for one who had been so cruelly exposed to temptation, prepared to place the beautiful Saracen on the seat she had occupied the preceding evening. She remarked, with deep gratification, this seeming desire on the part of her preserver. It was a solace to her oppressed spirit, and giving way to the tide of feeling which oppressed her, she threw her arms around the neck of Rudolph, and bestowed upon him the most endearing caresses. The poor boy shed bitter tears as the Monk raised her to the saddle, and when they had departed he threw himself at his length within the tent, and long lay there, a prey to feelings in which the painful was so mixed up with the pleasurable, that it would be difficult to say which predominated.

As the little party passed the tent of Abdallah, the latter called forth the attendants, who resumed their journey as on the preceding day, and, in the course of less than half an hour, they had passed the uttermost limits of the Christian camp. About mid-day, clouds of dust were seen in the distance, and apparently not far from what was known to be the outer line of the Moslem encampment. Soon there was distinguished a troop of infidel cavalry advancing at full speed towards them. Abdallah took a white scarf from beneath his coat of mail, and tied it to the end of his lance, then desiring de Boiscourt to keep behind him, he waved it some paces in advance of his little party. Seeing the flag, and knowing it to be a sign of amity, the leader of the Turkish troop halted his men when about a hundred yards from Abdallah, and coming forward himself, communicated with the latter in Moorish. Satisfactory explanations were soon rendered. In the affair of the preceding day, one of the favorite wives of Saladin had been carried off from her tent, near the outskirt of the encampment, with two of her attendants. The discovery had been made only after the close of the battle, and detachments had been out all night in pursuit of the straggling enemy into whose hands it was supposed they had fallen. One of these had entered the sycamore wood, where they had seen the bodies of the decapitated warriors of de Boiscourt, but no evidence of those of whom they were in search. The pursuit had been continued all night, and the party now encountered,

was on the point of returning, dispirited at their failure, to their camp, when they suddenly descried the two knights, and galloped towards them as has been shown.

Many and warm were the thanks of the Saracen commander, when Abdallah had detailed to him the manner in which the wife of Saladin had been rescued from the ruffians who had carried her off, and the cause of her thus appearing in the disguise of a Christian page. Quickly he dismounted from his high-mettled Arabian, and advanced and saluted her with the respect due to her position. The Moslem captain took her from the protecting arm of De Boiscourt, and placed her on his own charger, he himself walking at her side until he had rejoined his party. The knights, with heavy and oppressed feelings, made their parting obeisance, and then turning their chargers' heads, slowly and in silence retraced their steps to the Christian camp.

CHAPTER VII.

In order that the lax state of morals among the Crusaders, such as has been partially illustrated in the preceding pages, may be more distinctly comprehended by those ignorant of the semi-barbarous manners of the times, it may not be irrelevant to devote a few pages to the condition of society, as it existed both in Europe and in Palestine, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The picture is a startling one, and few will rise from the perusal without a deep sentiment of shame, that the avowed advancement of Christianity should have been prostituted to purposes the most vile, actions more than levelling with the brutes themselves. Nay, we will even go farther, and pronounce that the conduct of ninety-nine out of every hundred of the Crusaders so completely unhumanized their nature, that the only marvel is, how the Omnipotent God should have suffered his holy name and will to be desecrated by their fiendish manner of enforcing his Gospel, and thus, as it were, reducing his purity and overawing majesty to the mere condition of a Juggernaut, at whose bloody shrine whole hecatombs of human victims were to be sacrificed.

If there are men, even at this day, who, although spurning the charge of infidelity with generous disdain, have difficulty in believing in that creed which the armed masses of Christendom went forth to propagate with fire and sword, and which was not even *then* permitted to prosper, it is because of the obvious truth, that such agency never found favor with the Great God of the Universe. Had it ever been intended that the one faith alone should pervade the world, what more favorable opportunity than was then afforded? Patience, suffering, endurance, piety, humiliation, in the proper acceptation of these several terms, would have marked the progress of the Christian arms. Chastity, sobriety, meekness, would have been their watchwords, and thus the after progress of Christianity would have been assured.

Posterity would have believed in the result; they would have seen in it the directing finger of God. The minds of men would have been impressed with the beauty, the sublimity, and the truth of a system which was doomed to be worked out through such means, and (time, strengthening and consolidating the structure,) would have adored and clung to it as the last resting-place the stricken, yet confiding heart. But what were the agencies actually employed? Superstition, under the name of piety—fanaticism, under the garb of religion—fire, sword, pillage, hatred, uncharitableness, revolting lust, brutality—all the horrid passions that ever lowered man to the condition of the brute.

We are not, however, of the number of those who believe that the cruelties exercised by the great mass of the Crusaders over their Saracen foes, whenever victory hovered over their banners, was a result of the innate proneness of their hearts to deeds of blood. On the contrary, we believe with those who have entered much more diffusely into the subject, that the shedding of Saracen blood, and the commission of all manner of atrocities, was, with them, an imperative duty, and that they imagined it to be the highest service they could render—the most acceptable homage they could yield to their Creator. What a creed! And what a conception *they* must have had of the Deity who could thus have been propitiated! But this fanaticism was strongly in keeping with the principle that had led them forth to endure the most cruel privation. The great inconsistency was in this, that men thus imbued at the outset with principles of self-denial, should later, in moments of personal suffering, have lost sight of all the firmness of purpose with which they had embarked in the cause. So far from enduring with fortitude those privations which a correct appreciation of the object they had in view should have pointed out to them as a part and parcel of the thorny path they had vowed to travel for the restoration of the Cross, they sank beneath these afflictions whenever encountered; and, in a diabolical spirit, gave themselves up to indulgences and vices at which the soul of purity recoiled. What but the acme of fanaticism must have led them to believe that men who could thus wantonly forego their better natures, and wallow in the grossest sensuality, were in reality the chosen agents of God. What but the blindest infatuation, the most besotted ignorance, could have sustained them in the belief that they who nourished the seeds of vice and crime in their hearts, and who hesitated not to outrage humanity by ripping up the bellies and eating the flesh of their enemies, brutally exhumed from their graves, rather than perish of a hunger which, unappeased, had led to the martyrdom they pretended to covet, could expect to find favor in the sight of the All-wise.

But these were merely the progressive evidences of the madness of the undertaking. The result was not more inspiring or confirmatory of the divine character of their mission. After losing some millions of men and treasure—cutting some millions of throats, with a ferocity no tigers could equal, and indulging in every abomination of rape and murder, not only on their Saracen foes, but on their own people—was their end even partially attained? Did God manifest his approbation of the acts of these lunatic and wicked hordes? Did He will that the Cross, even when planted on the walls

of Jerusalem, should supersede the Crescent? Did He condescend to confirm the divinity of him who was called his Son, by conveying unmistakably to the world, in the overthrow of the power of Mahomet, that Christ was the true Messiah, before whom all men were to bend the knee? No, no. Not only Jerusalem and the whole of Palestine was conquered, it is true, but only that greater shame might come upon the cause of Christ, by its final forced relinquishment. Is there no evidence in this? There is. Had it been the will of the Most High that the doctrines of the Gospel should govern the universe, the time, certainly, would have been then. Eight centuries have rolled by since that crusade was commenced. Is there one Mussulman the less? But this is apart from the morals of those Christian people, who were so anxious, like the churchmen of the present day, to teach what they so indifferently practice.

That the grossest immorality should have prevailed in Europe, will readily enough be understood by those who are at all conversant with the habits of every class of that society, of which it has been recorded:—"The clergy were as licentious as the laity. The chiefs as immoral as the people." But that women, many of them of high social degree, should have abandoned themselves to these excesses, with the mere brutal impulse of the animal, while absent on a pilgrimage, which it might have been imagined would have guarded them in the hour of severest trial, is one of those paradoxes and contradictions in human nature, which strike the mind not only with astonishment but with humiliation. Sharing in the first instance that spirit of fanaticism which was so deeply imbued in the men, nothing could deter them from encountering, in an equal degree, the hardships, privations, and vicissitudes of the long journey to Palestine. All were animated by the same zeal—the same fervent belief that the Holy Sepulchre was the goal to which they were to bend their steps, there to receive the reward of all their sufferings at the foot of the Cross. And yet, what does history relate of these people, who, instead of enduring with humility, and in sackcloth, and ashes, the trials with which God had thought proper to visit them, could thus guiltily conduct themselves?

"All the distresses of the Crusaders," says a modern author,* borrowing from ancient writers, and in reference to their sufferings at Antioch, "were nothing before the walls compared with the horrors they suffered now that they were in possession of the city. Misery levelled all natural as well as artificial distinctions. The courage of the warrior—the pride of the nobleman—the dignified virtue of the matron, and the retired bashfulness of the maid—all were reduced to the level of the ignoble and vicious, by the cravings of unsatisfied and increasing hunger."

Such was the future—the painful, humiliating future; and yet these poor, misguided fanatics, religiously believed that the merciful God of all Nature was thus leading them to conquest! What strange infatuation! What blind credulity!

Then again, shortly after their liberation from this scourge, "Discord

* MILLS.

prevailed among the princes, and they even assisted their people in rapine and theft. Public justice did not restrain private injury, and the will of every man was his law." Later, at the siege of Morra, "they were soon reduced to their old resources of dog's flesh, and human carcasses. They broke open the tombs of the Mussulmans, ripped up the bellies of the dead for gold, and then dressed and eat the fragments of flesh."

Nay, even before the walls of Jerusalem, when it might have been imagined the religious fanaticism of their hearts would have taught them virtue and restraint, "misery," says the same writer, "had produced disorder and crime, and the clergy complained that in the short space of a month, the character of the Christian soldier before Jerusalem had become as immoral as it had been during the long and painful siege of Antioch. Superstition was as active as vice. At the moment when, during a terrible assault, all appeared lost, a knight was seen on Mount Olivet waving his glittering shield as a sign to the soldiers that they should rally and return to the charge. Godfrey* and Eustace cried to the army that St. George was come to their succor. The languishing spirit of enthusiasm was roused, and the Crusaders returned to the battle with pristine animation. Fatigue and disability vanished; the weary and the wounded were no longer distinguishable from the vigorous and active: the princes, the columns of the army, led the way, and their example awoke the most timid to gallant and noble daring. Nor were the women to be restrained from the fight: they were everywhere to be seen supporting and relieving their fainting friends. In the space of an hour the barbican was broken down, and Godfrey's tower rested against the inner wall. Changing the duties of the general for those of the soldier, the Duke of Lorraine fought with his bow. At the hour when the Saviour of the world had been crucified, a soldier, named Latoldus of Tournay, leaped upon the fortification; his brother Englebert followed, and Godfrey was the third Christian who stood as a conqueror on the ramparts of Jerusalem. The glorious ensign of the Cross streamed from its walls. The Mussulmans fought for awhile, and then fled to their temples, and submitted their necks to slaughter. Such was the carnage in the mosque of Omar, that the mutilated carcasses were hurried by the torrents of blood into the court; dismembered arms and hands floated into the current that carried them into contact with bodies to which they had not belonged. Ten thousand people were murdered in this sanctuary. It was not only the headless and lacerated trunks which shocked the sight, but the figures of the victors themselves reeking with the blood of their slaughtered enemies. No place of refuge remained to the vanquished, so indiscriminately did the insatiable fanaticism of the conquerors disregard both supplication and resistance. Some were slain, some were thrown from the tops of churches and the citadel. The synagogues were set on fire, and the Jews perished in the flames."

Thus it will be seen that, led away by their frantic enthusiasm, the Christian women were foremost in these scenes of blood. The historians of that epoch do not say whether they bore an active part in the murder of the un-

* The Duke de Bouillon.

happy Saracens, after the holy city had been taken, but it is difficult to divest the mind of the belief, that they who had previously made acquaintance with vice in all its phases, would feel little compunction in washing away their sins in the blood of the infidel, whose sacrifice they deemed would be most acceptable to God. Very different was the conduct of the ladies of Boemond's camp, who, according to Albert of Aix, on seeing the unceasing fury with which the Turks were dealing death to all ages, and both sexes, at the terrible battle of Dorylaeum, clothed themselves in their most becoming garments, and strove to display their charms to the best advantage, for the purpose of obtaining the duration of the harem rather than the grave. Sensible women!

In order to show that the institution of chivalry itself had a favorable influence on society, and in extirpating the prevailing grossness of the age, we cannot do better than quote the concluding remarks of another highly popular and indefatigable writer, who is not lightly read in the history and habits of the middle ages.

"Remarking these instances," he says, in allusion to the exemplary conduct of the order in Europe, "and seeing what the spirit of chivalry could produce in its perfection, we may judge what the society of that day would have been without it: we may trace truly the effect it had in civilizing the world, and we may comprehend the noble legacy it left to after years. Had chivalry not existed, all the vices which we behold in that period of the world's history would have been immensely increased; for there would have been no counteracting excitement. The immorality of those times would have been a thousand degrees more gross, for passion would have wanted the only principle of refinement: the ferocity of the brave would have shown itself in darker scenes of bloodshed, for no courtesy would have tempered it with gentleness. . . .

"Because knights were superstitious, it was supposed that superstition was a part of knighthood; but this was not the case. The tendency of the order was to purify and refine, and the civilization thereby given to the world in general ultimately produced its effect, in doing away superstition. The libertinism of society in the Middle Ages has also been wrongly attributed to knighthood, and thus the most beneficial institutions are too often confounded with the vices that spring up around them.

"In common with all human institutions, chivalry presents a new aspect in every page of the book of history. Sometimes it is severe and stern—sometimes light and gay—but the qualities of valor, courtesy, and enthusiasm, shine out at every period of its existence."

And concluding our chapter with this somewhat mutilated extract from the gifted author of the History of Chivalry,* we resume our narrative.

* James.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT the period at which the events recorded in the preceding chapters took place, Jerusalem had been in possession of the Crusaders upwards of eighty years. Godfrey de Bouillon, one of the most victorious of the Christian knights, had, immediately after its capture, been, by general acclamation, chosen as its king; but he did not survive his elevation to this high dignity more than a year. All sorts of infamy had, in the meantime, been perpetrated by the various chiefs of the invading crosses, who had partitioned among themselves the fairer fields of Palestine, until their acts of aggression and injustice became the means of waking up the slumbering energies of the yet untired Saladin, who, seized with a holy zeal, and guided by an honorable ambition, resolved to accomplish no less an undertaking than the re-conquest of the disputed city, which he was now rapidly approaching.

The day following that on which de Boiscourt and the Monk Knight had so warmly discussed the surpassing beauty, and the opening interest in the latter of the Lady Ernestina, was that fixed upon for the attack of the Saracen masses then laying siege to Tiberias, near Jerusalem, and composed of fifty thousand horse, and nearly two hundred thousand foot.

"What ho! Rudolph!" exclaimed the happy Knight, springing from his couch, fully an hour before dawn. "Up, up, and be doing! There is brave work cut out for us this day, and the sluggard must not lose his share of the glory. But fill me first a full goblet of my favorite Cyprus wine, and then for my armor. Jerusalem, the Holy City, won by the good swords and battle-axes of Godfrey, of Eustace, and of Baldwin, must be saved this day. Art ready for such a glorious fight, boy?"

"Wherever my lord leads, there Rudolph shall surely follow, even if it be unto the tent of Saladin himself," replied the youth, rising quickly, and trimming the dull and nearly wasted lamp; "but had I my choice," he added archly, "when once there, I should not be sorry to be detained a temporary prisoner, and bound with silken cords, by *one*, at least, of his seraglio."

"Ah, you young epicure! Better indeed is that slight frame fitted for the blandishments of Venus, than the more iron duties of Mars. But that reminds me—you say that wherever I lead, you will follow. Have I not, in my turn, followed where you have led? Nay, answer me, dear boy. In me you will find no jealous rival. Ah! never mind—that burning blush sufficiently tells the tale."

The brow of the boy was suffused with crimson, as lowering his beautiful eyes, he handed the wine without making any audible reply to the question of his Lord.

"Here is to your pretty Saracen mother, and to my own adored Ernestina," continued the Knight, as he drained off the goblet to within an inch or two of the bottom, and then offered it to the page. "Drink to them both, dear Rudolph; it may be the last time we shall pledge them in this life."

"All honor to the dear Lady Ernestina, and every blessing on the sweet mother you have given me," said the youth, as, with still flushed cheek and

dilating eye, he finished the contents of the goblet. Ah, that she were, indeed, my mother!"

"What! an infidel for your mother, Rudolph!" exclaimed the Knight.

"Christian or infidel, what matter?" murmured the boy. "Is she not, my lord, the beautiful creation of the same God? Alas! I have never known a mother's love—I never was pillowed on a mother's bosom until——"

"I understand you," interrupted the Knight, gently pressing his hand. "Rudolph, henceforth you are my younger brother in love, but now, further time to speak of this is denied. Quick—my armor."

"I obey," said the boy, with deep and fervent expression; "and may that armor guard from all harm, the noblest—pardon me, my lord, I must speak it out, or my bosom will burst—the most generous heart that ever beat under a warrior's corselet."

The Baron caught and pressed him to his heart, imprinted a kiss on his hot but open brow, and then bade him to his task.

In a few moments, both were equipped. The armor of the Knight consisted of a hauberk covering the whole of his person. It was of double chain mail, and formed of a hood-piece connected with a jacket with sleeves, and terminating in breeches, stockings, and shoes. To these, were added gauntlets, all of the same material. His head was moreover covered with the skull-cap usually worn by the knights before entering into battle. His war helmet was of burnished scales, and ornamented with a magnificent crest, on which were emblazoned the baronial arms. A surcoat of costly fur, on which also appeared the arms of his family, was thrown loosely over his closely-fitting hauberk, thus depriving the figure of the almost spectre-like appearance otherwise given to it by the chain mail.

"Go, Rudolph, to the tent of the Monk," enjoined the Baron, when the page, after donning his own light armor, had gathered together the Knight's helmet, battle-axe, banner and shield "bid him here if he has time, and is already equipped."

Soon after the boy had departed on his mission, the trampling of steeds was heard, and as the Baron moved forward, he met at the entrance one of his men-at-arms, fully equipped, and leading his war-horse, as well as the lighter gelding of Rudolph. He who generally acted as his groom, announced that the camp was already in motion, and the retainers of the young French knight forming even then their battle-array, which only the presence of their leader was wanting to complete.

"Good, good, Cœur-de-Fer," remarked the Baron, "you fellows are always anxious to be the first in a fight, but I find no such haste to get out of it;" then patting the neck of his battle-steed, who, seemingly conscious of the duty required of him, pricked his ears, pawed the earth, and neighed most lustily—"Hast fed them well, Cœur-de-Fer? They will require all they can get before night-fall, or much I mistake the character of the leader against whom we wield our battle-axes this day."

"*Diantre!* true enough, most noble Knight," returned the man. "The Infidels are in clouds, they say, under the very walls of Tiberias, and as Monsigneur states, we shall have hot work enough before the dew falls again, to moisten the lips of both horses and men: but you have only to order

Cœur-de-Fer to do a thing and it is done. The horses have been well fed, for luckily it is not now, as in the early days, when our ancestors came to Palestine. Then knights were obliged to eat their own chargers—the brave animals that had carried them through many a hard fight, to prevent themselves from starving, and were made to look contemptible in the eyes of the enemy, by having their baggage carried on the backs of dogs and pigs. Pardieu! the followers of the cross live more luxuriously now. Saladin, that scourge who threatens the Holy City, has not yet been long enough in arms to put us to that stretch."

This long speech, rather unusual at that period, in its familiarity of tone, but which the generous Knight did not, from his regard for the man, whom he considered one of the most attached and faithful of his followers, like to frown down, was now interrupted by the arrival of Rudolph, who, taking charge of the fiery and well conditioned steeds, afforded Cœur-de-Fer no further excuse for remaining. He accordingly departed to rejoin the body of the force.

"Well, Rudolph, what says Abdallah?" asked the young French Baron as they prepared to mount. "Will he be here anon, or do we take him up on our way to the advance, where I know his comrades, the valiant Knights of St. John, closely watch the motions of Saladin and his host?"

"The Monk Abdallah, my lord, is not to be found in the encampment, where he rested last night. He set forth alone and armed, long before the dawn, and has, doubtless, now gained the position occupied by the Knights of St. John. They who bore me these tidings, state that as soon as he seated himself in his saddle, he buried his long and heavy spurs in the flanks of his noble charger, and passed out of the encampment with the rapidity of the wind."

"Indeed!" said de Boiscourt, whose countenance had been gradually falling during this short recital, for he really felt deep disappointment at his heart; "this is strange—but it is well, Rudolph, that you have stated this before leaving the tent. Another goblet—a full goblet of Cyprus wine: it will drown thought, and I do not wish to think to-day."

Rudolph, sad himself, because he saw that the unannounced departure of the Monk-Knight had given pain, he knew not wherefore, to his noble master, silently laid down the arms he was about to gird about him, and opened and offered the wine. The Baron drained its contents at a draught, and as he did so, his charger whinnying, half turned his head, and cast his eye upon the sparkling liquid, as if anxious to share it with him.

"By the Saints! a good thought," exclaimed the Knight, whose annoyance had somewhat excited him; "another flask, dear Rudolph. Both horse and rider must outdo themselves this day. There—that will do. Hold Belœil steadily by the head, while I cause him to revel in the luxury of the gods; but stay—you are not tall enough, boy. Give me the bridle, and I myself will do it."

Seizing the mouthpiece with his left hand, he held up the head of the horse with such a strong grasp, that he easily introduced into his throat the neck of the flask, which was nearly emptied before he withdrew it. The effect was soon evident—the eye of the glossy black steed beamed with in-

creased fire, and he champed his bit, and pawed with a restlessness he had never before manifested.

Rudolph, in the meanwhile, who seldom anticipated a hard day's work without making due preparation for contingencies, thrust into one of two pairs of small panniers with which the cruppers of his saddle was provided, a couple of bottles of the same wine emptied into tin flasks made for the purpose, and well stopped up; and into the other, the morning food, of which the Baron had not yet tasted. This done, he held the bridle of the Knight's charger until he mounted, and then vaulting lightly into his own saddle, rode into the tent, and took from a table near the entrance, on which they lay, the spare armor and weapons, and escutcheon of the Lord of Auvergne. They then pursued their way to the heart of the encampment, where his retainers—a numerous, bold, and imposing force—were already drawn up as *Cœur-de-Fer*, had stated. The order to march was soon afterwards given, and the whole of the Christian force moved forward with alacrity, under their several banners to encounter their hated enemies, then waiting for them near the lake of Tiberias.

The young Baron de Boiscourt, followed by the gentle Rudolph, whom we have seen he loved with exceeding tenderness, even while compelled by the customs of the order to treat him with a certain reserve in public, rode some yards in advance of his inferior knights, who, in their turn, took the lead of the men-at-arms. His charger, inspirited by the unusual fire that had been communicated to his blood, was with difficulty restrained by the accustomed hand of his rider, and manifested his impatience by spurning far behind him, the parched and sandy earth which annoyed his fetlocks with its heat, even at that early hour. The occupation thus afforded to de Boiscourt, in a measure distracted his mind from the unpleasant reflections to which the tidings of Abdallah's strange and unexplained disappearance had given rise, but finally they forced themselves upon him with a pertinacity no outward influence could prevent, while the additional wine he had taken, with a view to drown recollection, seemed to have produced the contrary effect of rendering it more vivid and distinct. In spite of his efforts to rally his spirits and treat the matter lightly, his heart was deeply afflicted, for he feared that a sentiment inimical to the close friendship which had hitherto existed between them, and arising from their conversation of the preceding day, had been the cause of his singular conduct. He was well aware of the holiness and purity of life which the Monk had constantly preserved in the midst of the strongest temptations by which the flesh could be beset; and it was therefore natural to infer that his mind would recoil from further association with one who, instead of fortifying him in his virtuous resolution, had used so much diligence to undermine it.

The Baron was deeply grieved at this, not through any wrong he himself found in what he had done, but because of its effect upon him he so well loved, and that at a moment when he had believed him to have been irresistibly won to his dearest hopes. Nor must the reader of the nineteenth century feel surprised at the sentiments which governed the heart of civilized man in the twelfth. The looseness of moral feeling—the indulgence of every appetite peculiar to that age, have already been alluded to; so much so, in-

deed, that it has been asserted by the old chroniclers "that there was not one chaste woman in Palestine," and that, in the better circles of society, "it was scarcely possible for a child to know its own father, neither was it expected of him." No wonder, then, that amid such universal corruption, a generous and ardent nature, like that of de Boiscourt, should seek indulgence, not in the grossness of sensuality which governed the mass, but in that refined and tender voluptuousness which lives in the soul rather than in the senses. He loved, he adored his Ernestina, with all the intensity of his glowing heart. He regarded Abdallah with a feeling that rose far above friendship; he looked upon him as something more than human; and no serf of his own flowery land ever yielded up the person of his bride to the Lord of the domain, with one-thousandth part of the joy with which he would have warmed the soul of the majestic Monk towards his beautiful beloved. His whole care, therefore, was to instil, and feed in each an overwhelming passion for the other. Only the evening before, he had been happy in the thought of his eventual success—for the agitation shown by the Monk—the fiery language he had used—the final determination he had expressed, seemed to announce the existence of a passion nursed in solitude, which no consideration, human or priestly, could restrain from fulfilment. Where vice was so prevalent, mere libertinism so tolerated, there could be neither heart nor feeling to lend to passion that which alone could dignify and render it what it is—the greatest gift—the most exquisite proof of the boundless love of the great God of the Universe.

De Boiscourt was not a mere sensualist, in the vulgar acceptance of the term. Women, whose lives were grossly dissolute from habit—and there were but few at that day who were not—could yield him no pleasure in their embrace; and although we have seen him abandoned to the fullest impetuosity of passionate endearment while exposed to the seductive beauty of the captive Saracen, there was mingled in his devotion to her a delicacy, an earnestness and warmth of feeling, which he had never known in the arms of any but his own Ernestina. He was, in act, perhaps one of the strictest of the Knights of the Holy Land—the Templars and the Order of St. John always excepted; but in proportion as he was insensible to the grosser appetites of the animal, he yielded up his soul to the most enchanting images of what passion might, and what his peculiar creed told him it should be. Regarding his Ernestina and Abdallah as he did, his imagination revelled in the thought of what they might be to each other, and that without, in the slightest degree, impairing the fervor of love of the one, or the warmth and sincerity of friendship of the other, for himself. And thus satisfied, for he would not have given up the treasure of her heart's affection for worlds—thus assured that the happiness of the holy Monk would be a source of no sorrow to himself, but rather that the bond, which united them all, would be strengthened into unceasing durability by the gratification and outpouring of the fulness of their hearts, he sought to infuse into the breast of each a fierce and unspoken passion for the other. With a burning pen, and in the quaint language of the day, he had first addressed himself to his wife. He had described, in glowing terms, all the circumstances connected with his first meeting with Abdallah, and had so contrived to awaken her interest

by contrasting his holy and strict life, with the extraordinary physical attributes of the man, and the indomitable heroism of the warrior, that many and many a lone night had she passed, in the dull chateau of Auvergne, in thinking, as she had artlessly confessed, of the noble Monk Knight, quite as much as of her wedded lord—her generous and confiding husband. The innate, and for the age, remarkable modesty of her own pure though imaginative nature, had prevented her from answering, in the impassioned language used by himself; but de Boiscourt could trace in her letters that the sentiment, he so much sought to instil, was fast diffusing itself throughout her being, and that her expanding heart was rapidly becoming ample enough to admit into its warmest recesses, the image of a lover second to himself. What Roseau has since been, his noble countryman, de Boiscourt, then was; but more frank, more ardent, more generous, more liberal and self-immolating, where the happiness of those he loved required the more than human sacrifice of self. And yet, with him it was no sacrifice. It would rather have been a sacrifice to have abstained from the tri-union of hearts it had now become the chief duty of those hours, not devoted to his knightly duties, to promote.

Such were the reflections of the Baron, as he rode impatiently in the advance of his men, his eye keenly fixed on the Saracen host, then deploying, with great pomp, their glittering order of battle to meet the approaching Christians, while his heart exulted in a wild determination to expose himself wherever the danger seemed hottest.

CHAPTER IX.

THE day was bright and scorching—the arid sands, over which the Christians moved, rose in impalpable dust, and parched the throats of the tens of thousands composing their array. Fatigued and dispirited, and suffering intensely from a thirst which had lasted for many hours, they nevertheless were animated by a zeal, which rendered them reckless of personal privation, as they crossed the great plain, towards the lake of Tiberias, where the cautious Saladin awaited their onset of battle. He had marked and exulted in their error. They had imprudently thrown all the advantage of the conflict out of their own hands into his. Had they continued encamped under the walls of Jerusalem, and there awaited his approach, they would have forced upon him the privation they so unnecessarily encountered themselves, and thus more than neutralized the great disparity of numbers of their fighting men. The Saracens were as little capable of enduring the thirst of that Syrian region as were their enemies, and the wily and sagacious Saladin well knew that, before his army could traverse that burning plain, thousands would have been disabled through exhaustion, from partaking in the struggle. The more to harass the Christians, he withdrew slowly as they advanced,

and not until they had gained the farther extremity of the plain, did he finally halt his masses to receive them. Then commenced the most fearful carnage. Like fiends, the adverse squadrons fell upon each other; and the slaughter on both sides was so great that, over the whole space occupied by the two armies, the sands were saturated and discolored with the blood of men and of horses. Shouts, which rent the air, as if ten thousand devils had broken loose from their confinement, marked the onslaught of the Christians, fainting from exhaustion, thirst, and heat, while their equally enthusiastic, but fresher foes, answered to their furious cries of hatred and vengeance, by the ear-piercing clang of their trumpets and atabals. Death and desolation marked the hand-to-hand encounter of the two hosts, and men stood aghast at the vastness of the cruelty of their own prowess—of their own deeds of blood. "Christ and the Cross" was the battle-cry of one party—"Mahomet and the Crescent" that of the other; and if the true faith were to have been measured and acknowledged by the standard of blood shed by each army that day, it would have been difficult to decide to whom the palm of ascendancy should have been awarded. Clouds of dust, raised by the hoofs of the steeds of the warriors, and by the struggling feet of men in their last agony, hid from both armies the sunlight of heaven, and formed a hot and floating veil which glistened in countless millions of atoms, over their devoted heads, adding to the fearful sense of suffocation they otherwise endured. So deadly was the fight—so confounded the *melée* of horse and foot—of knights and men-at-arms—that acts of individual prowess were scarcely distinguished from their very multiplicity. It was one general slaughter-field of man, created in God's fashion, and mercilessly cut down by his fellow-man, who looked eagerly at the streams of blood that flowed around him, as if he would have slaked in it the burning thirst which dried up the juices of his body, and gave him a foretaste of the torments of the damned.

The whole of that fearful day, the tide of battle ceased not to rage, yet without manifest advantage to either host. The Christians made the most stupendous efforts to reach the wells, which lay close behind the forces of Saladin, fighting with a ferocity which had not been surpassed in their conquest of Jerusalem itself, and throwing themselves madly upon the lances of their enemies, to force a passage to the coveted water. But the Saracen leader knew too well his advantage. While his own troops entered fresh into the conflict, he had marked with satisfaction, the tottering advance of their foes, sustained only by their indomitable zeal, and he had made his dispositions accordingly. He had seen them covered, choked with the sands they had traversed, and, with parched throats, reeling from the accumulation of suffering to which they had been exposed. To preserve the living wall of his army, which formed the only barrier interposed between the Christians and the wells, which would have afforded them new energy and strength, had been his chief object, and gap after gap was filled up, the moment a point of attack had been forced. Night came on, and still the object of the Christians was unattained. Foiled, dispirited, they slowly retired and took up a position where a cluster of high and precipitous rocks promised them security from surprise during the night, but here their sufferings were unabated. Water there was none, and to add to the tortures they endured, the hot

Syrian night-air was rendered more intensely arid by fires which had been applied by the Saracens to various parts of a wood in close contiguity to their temporary encampment.

Nearly at the head of that tired and sleepless host, sat a helmeted knight, with his back reposing against a flat and projecting rock. His armor and rich surcoat of fur were covered with blood and dust, formed into a thick paste, so thickly streaked upon them, that it was difficult to tell the original color of either. Close at his side was a page holding two steeds, covered with dust also; one, with his jaded head drooping to the ground, and with languid and half-closed eyes, attesting the excess of fatigue and privation which he had undergone. The second and larger animal exhibited no such signs of weakness. He champed his bit and pricked his ears unceasingly, as if impatient to be let loose again upon the course he had so recently run. The page himself was overcome by drowsiness, and, ever and anon, dropped his head upon his chest heavily, but was almost instantly recalled to himself, as the fiery steed tossed up his head at intervals, and drew the bridle, with a strong, quick jerk, through his bent arm.

"Poor boy," remarked the Knight, in a low tone of commiseration—"if you can sleep amid this terrible drought, great must be your fatigue, indeed. But, wherefore should I wonder that it is so. Few of the men of Auvergne have followed me to-day more closely than yourself. Sleep, dear boy, sleep. The waking of to-morrow will be a terrible one."

As he thus spoke, the generous Knight slipped the bridle of his own impatient steed from the arm of the page and inserted it within his own. The effect on the tired youth was instantaneous. The other horse was too motionless to disquiet him, and when the boy's head again sank upon his chest, he profoundly slept.

De Boiscourt—for it was indeed that gallant and noble-hearted knight who had taken up his position at the head of his surviving retainers, waiting for the dawn—sat for some moments with his arms folded across his chest, and indulging in the same painful train of thought which had caused him so much melancholy reflection in the morning. Suddenly, the pricking of the ears, and the whinnying of Belœil, in a tone which seemed to indicate the presence of some familiar acquaintance, caught his attention, and caused him to turn his eyes in the direction in which he now first heard the faint trampling of horse's feet. As the object drew nearer to him, the outline of a mounted knight was dimly visible, and then, as it approached, nearer the heart of the Baron beat quickly, happily, impatiently—for there was no mistaking that majestic horseman. It was Abdallah, fully equipped in his warrior's garb.

Starting up from the ground on which he sat, de Boiscourt advanced to meet him, leading Belœil by the bridle, and with a sentiment of almost fear at his heart, lest he should be disappointed in the manner of his reception. Deep was his joy, however, when the latter, dismounting slowly from his war-horse, embraced him with all the ardor of their usual friendship. They then approached the spot which the Baron had just left, and turning the angle of the rock, seated themselves a few yards from Rudolph, who now hidden from view, still profoundly slept. The Knights held their own

horses, which, with mutual recognition, licked each others head and neck, and otherwise seemed nearly as glad as their riders at the reunion.

"Dearest Abdallah," observed the Baron, when they had exchanged the first warm evidences of their friendship. "If you knew what I had suffered from your leaving the camp, without apprising me of your intention, you never would have pained me thus. Ah! I never knew until this day, that friendship can feel as keenly in its disappointment as love. What caused your abrupt departure?"

"The explanation is soon given," returned the Monk, whose countenance, calm and dignified as usual, was strongly reflected in the moonlight.—"But, dear de Boiscourt, the fatigue of this terrible day has so cloven my tongue to my parched palate, that I must be brief in words. That," he pursued, "was a master-stroke of Saladin, in forcing us to traverse the plain, instead of harassing the Moslem ranks by coming to us. Had the sage advice of the Count of Tripoli found the weight it deserved, that false move of the Christians would never have been made, and the Holy City of the Cross would not at this hour stand imperilled."

"Imperilled!" returned the Baron, "and wherefore imperilled, Abdallah?" "Will not to-morrow's sun go down upon a field of carnage, moistened more with Moslem than with Christian blood? Will not the banners of the Cross float over these very wells the Saracen has so stubbornly withheld from us this day, and which, when gained, will flow like manna to the sick soul, giving new strength and confidence to the Christian host. In a word, shall we not, to-morrow, revenge the partial discomfiture of to-day? Yes—by the Cross, we shall!"

"Nay, dear de Boiscourt," replied the Monk, with solemnity; "your generous and enterprising soul renders you more sanguine than the gloomy aspect of our affairs would seem to justify. Alas! I feel not thus confident. Well do I know that all that zeal and heroism can affect will be essayed, but we cannot war against nature—"

"Ah! say you so," quickly interrupted the Baron, his mind still engrossed by the one sole subject in which he took delight; "you admit, then, the impossibility of man warring against nature."

"Yes," answered the Monk, hoarsely—almost fiercely—as he pressed unconsciously, with iron grasp, the hand of the Baron. "I admit it even in the sense in which you mean it; but"—he resumed, after a short pause, in his usually composed manner—"that was not what I would have stated here. I meant to convey that the Christian forces, worn out by fatigue, and half maddened by the agonizing stings of thirst, cannot hope successfully to contend against an enemy nearly double in number, and even now, while I speak, perhaps, cooling their parched frames from those very wells they have so carefully guarded, and to fill my helmet from which, before entering into battle, I would almost consent to lose my shield-arm. De Boiscourt," pursued the Monk, sadly, "if even I, who have, in accordance with the strict duties of my order, lived a life of privation—of constant and unflinching war against the flesh—feel thus, what must not be the effect upon the mass who have not been taught the fortitude to bear! But I can no more," he con-

cluded faintly, "my lips almost refuse to do their office, so parched are they, so deficient in moisture is my tongue."

"Oh, Abdallah! but stay—Rudolph, boy, awake—come hither immediately," and de Boiscourt started to his feet.

Roused by the sound of his master's voice, the boy dropped the reins of his palfrey, and advanced, rubbing his eyes, to the spot whence the voice proceeded, but when, on turning the angle of the rock, he beheld him not alone, but in company with the Monk, the joy of his young heart could not be suppressed, and throwing himself on his knees, he placed his arms round Abdallah's neck, shed a paroxysm of tears, and uttered the most winning and affectionate expressions of delight at once more beholding him.

"Poor child!" said the Monk, with much emotion, as he pressed him fondly and paternally to his heart, "well do I esteem these marks of your affection; but wherefore is it, Rudolph, that I have won this new and exceeding interest in your regard. I had always thought you looked upon me as one too stern to command your confidence and friendship."

"Ah! Sir Monk," replied the generous boy, "not my high esteem for you alone, but my deep love for my master, the husband of the dear Lady Ernestina, has caused me to act thus unseemly for a page. But did you know what agony of mind he has secretly endured, yet failed to conceal from my too observant eye, you would not wonder at the deep, wild joy I felt, on waking from a dream of horror, in which, methought we were all perishing of thirst, to find, with my lord, the dear friend whose absence he has so greatly mourned."

"Rudolph," said the Baron, taking his hand as he rose from his knees, "you say that your dream announced that we were all perishing of thirst—alas! this will be too true, unless you have made some provision against it. I almost dread to ask you whether, with your usual prudence and forethought, you garnished your flasks this morning before leaving the tent, and if so, whether they have escaped the descending battle-axes and scimeters of the Moslems?"

"Thank, thank God, I did provide," returned the youth, eagerly, "I filled both flasks with wine while my lord was mounting. I had, most strange to say, forgotten all about it; but ah, it is well; for now, in the moment of most need, is it untouched. No battle-axe or scimeter has injured the flasks, for, you know, my lord, I was too well guarded from their blows by yourself."

"Quick, dear Rudolph, and bring hither a flask, for the noble Monk requires it much, nor less myself, nor you, dear boy. Ah, if this be not manna in the wilderness, what is it?"

Rudolph hastened to secure his prize; but, to his great dismay, on reaching the spot where he had left his dozing horse, the animal was nowhere to be seen. The horror of his feelings was great beyond expression, not so much for the loss of his horse, as of the liquid treasure with which he was laden. Not daring to announce his misfortune, he followed in pursuit, taking the narrow path among the winding rocks which led to the vanguard of the Baron's retainers, where he hoped to find the further advance of the animal arrested. Running with fleetness, he had not gone more than fifty yards,

when he fancied he could distinguish the outline of a horse, relieved against the face of a slate-colored rock. As he drew nearer he was convinced that it was his own, but he now also distinctly observed a human figure between the animal and the rock, whom he at once recognized as one of the Baron's men-at-arms. He was evidently rifling the panniers of their contents, for he held up one of the flasks to the light of the moon, as if with the view to ascertain the quality of its contents.

CHAPTER X.

THAT sight was sufficient to arouse all the energies of the gentle boy. The fear of losing one drop of the precious wine, caused him to utter a loud and startling shout, as he rushed determinedly towards the evident purloiner of his treasure. Surprised at the interruption, the latter dropped the hand which held the flask, and advanced to confront the intruder. As he stood face to face with him, he recognized the hard features of Cœur-de-Fer.

"Ha! is that you, then? I thought that some unknown knave had stolen my little Blondin, but now, I see, it is you. He slept, the cunning rascal, while Belœil was near him, but the moment my lord, seeing me fatigued with holding both, led him round the angle of the rock, near which we lay, and therefore out of his sight, he thought his companion was gone. Coming this way you met him. Was it not so, Cœur-de-Fer. Ah, my good fellow, how much I have to thank you for. You have saved my lord's life."

"Indeed! young Master Rudolph, and how is that, pray?" asked the man-at-arms, composedly, as he proceeded to unscrew the metal stopper of the flask, which, however, swollen with moisture as it was, resisted all his efforts.

"Hold! Cœur-de-Fer, you surely do not mean to rob my lord of his property," remarked the page, eagerly and angrily. Consider that the Baron and his friend, the Monk Knight, Abdallah, are even at this moment panting like Dives from thirst, and waiting to cool their scorched palates from that flask."

"Indeed," again sneered the man; "are you sincere in what you say, Master Rudolph?"

"What I say, Cœur-de-Fer, is most true," returned the boy, in some measure discouraged at the man's insolence of tone.

"And who suffers the most in his thirst?" demanded the fellow, coolly. "the Baron or the Monk?"

"Oh! the Monk," returned the Page, replying to his question, purely from a desire to gain the object he had in view. "He is almost speechless from thirst."

"Ha! that is well! exclaimed Cœur-de-Fer, "let him thirst and be damned in his thirst. The thought will render my own draught the sweeter. It will revenge the death of the brave Thibaud, and of his comrades. Besides, child, necessity knows no law of right—none of the *meum and tuum*

nonsense I've heard speak of in the monastery of Auvergne. If the Baron is suffering from thirst, I am very sorry for him, but, *pardieu*, I have the same complaint myself, and before I give up the ghost, I would fain tickle my palate with what has never yet passed lip of mine since I left our beautiful south—some of that tempting-looking Cyprus wine, with which I have more than once seen you garnish these hampers. As for the Monk," he continued, savagely, "let him die."

"And wherefore this most unchristian bitterness against the pious Monk," returned the youth, in accents that were intended to soothe the rough Cœur-de-Fer into a change of purpose. "What can he have done to provoke your anger?"

"Pious Monk! said you?" retorted the man-at-arms, furiously: "piety like his be damned. Pretty piety, truly, to cut off half a dozen servants of the true God, merely because they ravished a few infidel women, and therefore did honor to the accursed of Christ and of his followers. Look you here, Master Rudolph, I know what I speak about. I was one of a party of six, who, under Thibaud, about two years ago, took three Saracen women prisoners and carried them into a wood as our prize and spoil. Well, two of them were already sacrificed, and Thibaud was about overcoming the scruples of the third, (who was the mistress, and the most beautiful of them,) when the devil must make his appearance in the shape of this Monk, who, with as many blows of his flashing scimeter, lopped off the heads of my five companions, and not satisfied with this, took Thibaud up in his hands as though he had been no heavier than a shadow, and dashed his brains out against the very tree, where I, on hearing the Monk come up, had hidden myself, and from behind which I had witnessed the whole scene. *Pardieu!* had he waited until Thibaud had finished his little bit of love making, I could have forgiven his killing him afterwards, but not then. It disappointed Thibaud—it disappointed me, and I have hated him most cordially ever since."

"Villain!" muttered the page; a thousand recollections connected with that circumstance rushing upon his memory. "You were then one of that ruffian party, and my lord, in ignorance of this, has ever since retained you in his confidence!"

"And why not, Master Rudolph? Has not the confidence been well repaid? Have I not always done my duty both in camp as in the field—as well as his groom and forager, as his man-at-arms? I have no enmity against the Baron, boy; he has always been kind to me, but I never looked upon that cursed Monk-Knight, without feeling a sensation of hate, as in fancy I feel his sharp scimeter across my own neck."

"But you will give me up my flask, Cœur-de-Fer," continued the youth, in an insinuating tone; "you know my lord languishes; let us not waste the time in further parley"

"Yes;" returned the man fiercely, "and the Monk languishes. Let him in imagination slake his thirst in the blood of Thibaud and his fellow victims, and tell my lord, that though men have eaten each other to stay their appetite before this, I only drink his wine. And this, not because I regard him less, but because I love myself more. Think not," he added, with sar-

casualty, "that I have passed almost half the night in watching for my prize, to surrender it thus easily at your praying, Master Rudolph. Say to the Baron, that to-morrow I shall be prepared to lay down my life in battle for the Cross, but that I cannot yield him this. Ah! how sweet will be the quaffing of the delicious stuff before I die. Still, Rudolph, for old acquaintance sake, will I give you from the flask, to cool *your* burning tongue."

"Ruffian!" shouted the boy, stamping his foot violently on the ground, "you then stole the horse, and he did not stray to you. Out upon your intended regard for me. But dare to taste of that liquor, and your blood be upon your own head."

"Ha! do you threaten, young sir—a puny thing like you, to use such language to the strongest man-at-arms in the Baron's force? This may do for Gascony but not in Auvergne. By my troth!" he added, furiously, "unless you put a bridle on your pert tongue, I will slay and hurl your carcase behind these rocks for the vulture to feast upon at his leisure."

"God defend the right!" cried the boy, as he saw that Cœur-de-Fer was gradually loosening the stopper which had at length been moved; then, uttering de Boiscourt's name in a loud and piercing key, he sprang like a young tiger upon him, and clenched his hand around his neck with a force of which he had never believed himself capable.

Astonished, enraged, and nearly half-throttled, the man was compelled to drop the flask, in order to have the free use of his hands. Furious with pain, he shook the boy so violently, that he, in turn, was driven from his hold, when Cœur-de-Fer, grasping both arms in his iron clutch, tore them asunder from his throat, and dashed him heavily to the ground.

"Young fool!" he muttered hoarsely, as he stooped over him, "you have provoked your own fate. There must be no one to tell of this hereafter."

With one hand he felt the light armor of the page, fiercely struggling to free himself, for an opening through which he might direct the point of the short rude dagger, which he had unsheathed, and now held aloft in his right hand.

"Ha! ha! ha! caitiff!" laughed Rudolph, bitterly—almost hysterically, "do you experience that tingling sensation in your neck now? just fancy that, like Thibaud, you feel the sharp scimeter of the Monk-Knight; or, the very moment when you feel your purpose about to be accomplished —"

"Damned be the Monk—may his soul burn in —"

His speech was abruptly closed—or if the word "hell" came from his lips, it must have been uttered in too low a voice to be heard. The blow had taken off the arm at the shoulder, and apparently extinguished life.

It was a singular coincidence, as the younger knight afterwards remarked, that the same arm and the same scimeter, but at a different epoch of time, should have punished the last of the band that had carried on their lustful orgies in the heart of the sycamore wood. It was Abdallah, who, aroused by the first piercing cry of the boy had, with de Boiscourt, flown to his rescue, and guided by the sounds of struggle between the unequal combatants, traced their way without difficulty to the spot. The younger knight leading their steeds, was a little in the rear, but Abdallah, who at a glance had observed the condition of affairs, fearing that the tramp of their feet might

precipitate the catastrophe he sought to avoid, motioned to his friend to remain stationary, while he stole cautiously forward with his scimeter bared, and even savagely grasped. *Cœur-de-Fer* had been too much excited to notice the approach of any one, for his soul was filled with shame at having thus been rudely insulted and throttled by a boy whom he despised for his very physical weakness, and now resolved to destroy; and so furious was he, that not even the mocking warning of Rudolph, which was meant to divert him from his aim, could for one moment turn him from his purpose. Stealthy and prompt, however, as had been the advance of Abdallah, he might have been too late to save the life of the boy, had not the latter kept his body in such unceasing motion, as to cause his assailant great delay in finding an accessible point to his heart, and successfully directing the dagger where he had.

"The wine—the wine—God be praised! the wine is saved," was the first thought and exclamation of Rudolph, as, springing lightly to his feet, he flew to the spot where the infuriated Auvergnois had dropped the flask to the earth. Ha! here it is—untouched, undefiled, by his ruffian lips. Sir Monk, you have this night saved Rudolph's life, as some half dozen times before you have shielded that of my lord and master. Oh, think then," and he bent him reverently, "how deep is my rejoicement at the sudden resolution with which a divine Power must have inspired me to preserve this for those I so much love, and who so much require it."

In vain, however, Rudolph essayed to unscrew the top. His fingers slipped around it, and he was compelled to hand it to the Monk to open. But even the great strength of the latter availed not more, when, using his scimeter, he, with a slight sharp blow from this, severed the leaden head from its body.

It must not be supposed that the flasks of that day bore any resemblance to the puny things of the present. Like those who used them, they were on a scale of grandeur, and contained each nearly half a gallon of whatever refreshing beverage was placed in them for the use of the knight, and such of his brother warriors as he chose should share with him, when the fatigue of the battle was over, and themselves far without reach of their own stores. The leaden, or pewter, or silver flasks—for they varied in value, according to the rank or individual taste of their owners—was broad, large, and flat; and fitted, as has been stated, into panniers, partially hidden under the mantle which the squire or page usually carried on his crupper. They were not an indispensable, or even general, portion of the equipment of these latter, but under those scorching suns, and in a country where water could only be obtained at particular points and long intervals of a march, they had been introduced by a majority of the knights, who were not of the severer and self-mortifying orders. Many a hard-fought contest was cheated of a portion of its toil, whenever the parched lips of the jaded knight could be refreshed from these portable wells, whether of water or of wine, by his faithful page.

It has already been seen that Abdallah, however denying to himself even the presence of women, was by no means rigid in his abstinence from wine, not that he ever indulged in it to excess, but that his ideas of temperance—more regulated by quantity than by quality—nor indeed was it enjoined, by

the rules of the Order of St. John, that more than sobriety should be kept in view by its members.

It was not likely then that, on the present occasion, after having endured almost unto fainting, so many hours of intolerable thirst, he would impose upon himself any very severe restraint, or fail to indemnify himself for the terrible torture he had suffered from the maddening influence of that thirst. Water had been to him far more acceptable than wine, but in the absence of the former, the latter, from its comparative lightness, was without price. Putting the heavy flask to his lips, therefore, he drank, not with avidity, but slowly and deliberately, and as he felt each drop of the wine insinuating itself as it were into his system, and mingling with his blood, while it infused fresh vigor into his tired frame, he experienced the only true sensation of voluptuous enjoyment he had ever known: nor did he stay the delicious draught, until nearly half of the generous wine had passed his lips.

Breathing a deep breath when he had finished, he sank upon his knees, and, with uplifted hands, gave thanks to God aloud, not only for the sustenance of his strength, but for the relief afforded him from the anguish he had endured.

"And you, too, my dear child, I must not, while rendering thanks to the All-merciful, forget its noble and generous instrument. But you are here, de Boiscourt. Drink."

"Right gladly," said the Baron, shaking the still well-filled flask which he had received from the hands of the Monk, and now held up to his own lips. "Here's to Ernestina!"

"Whom God of his infinite goodness bless," exclaimed the Monk, fervently, and in a deep and impassioned tone.

"Spare it not, my lord," urged Rudolph, "its fellow is in the same pannier. Ah! how lucky it was my jumping at that fellow's throat. But for that sudden thought, what would have become of us?"

"Who is the ruffian?" asked de Boiscourt as, after having swallowed about half of what Abdallah had left, he handed it in turn to the page, with an injunction to drink likewise, but sparingly.

"It is Cœur-de-Fer, my lord," returned the boy. "Thank Heaven, the villain has no further power to harm."

"Cœur-de-fer and villain!" returned the Baron with amazement, "Do you mean that my own faithful groom was your assailant? Explain, boy."

In a few brief words Rudolph, who had now merely moistened his lips from the wine flask, communicated the whole of the facts connected with the loss of his Blondin, his finding him in the possession of Cœur-de-fer, already in the very act of rifling the panniers; his entreaty in favor of the Baron and of the Monk; the insolent message of the fellow to his lord; his declared hatred of Abdallah, and its cause; the altercation and struggle which ensued, and lastly, the certainty with which he looked upon death at the very moment when, glancing forward as he lay beneath the grasp of the assassin, he beheld the Monk-Knight coming to his rescue.

"Noble boy," said de Boiscourt, as he caught and pressed the page to his heart, "well have you acted. But for your firmness and presence of mind, we had all, indeed, suffered the tortures of the damned. But how, Rudolph,

could you think of trying your strength against such a giant? Sweet will be the kiss the Lady Ernestina will bestow upon your fair brow, and as for the pretty Henriette, she will absolutely devour her little page with the rose buds of her lips."

"Oh, my lord," said the boy, whose blushes the night alone concealed, "I am so happy that I did it. It was a hopeless case, to be sure, but I hadn't time to reflect on the danger. I was wild with dismay, for I knew that the noble Monk was weary and faint from thirst, and I fancied my lord's sufferings scarcely to be less. Nay, I was the more miserable, because I knew the fault was my own, for I had no business to leave Blondin loose as I did. Cœur-de-fer never would have stolen him, if I had led him by the bridle when my lord called me to him.

"I cannot help thinking of the fate of that scoundrel," said the Baron, musingly. You say he admitted himself to have been one of the party who fell by the scimeter of Abdallah, two years ago, and that he escaped unseen and unharmed. Little did he think, while avoiding the punishment due to his crimes on that green and velvet sward, that he should meet it afterwards, and from the same hand, amid those savage rocks. Surely, surely this is the work of an over-ruling Providence. But come, Abdallah, let us again seat ourselves and while away the time until dawn."

CHAPTER XI.

THE spot where they were being as well adapted for their purpose as that which they had just quitted, the friends reseated themselves, and within a few yards of the bleeding body of Cœur-de-fer. The head of the ruffian lay at the opposite side of the winding pathway, and with the face turned towards them, looking, in the moonlight, horrible in its ghastliness and fixedness of feature. While Rudolph, now fully awakened from his slumber, lightly held his recovered palfrey, the friends had the bridles of their chargers carelessly thrown over their arms. Both remarked that, although the war steed of the Monk was the stronger animal, and usually capable of enduring the greatest fatigue, he now appeared jaded and sluggish, while Belœil, on the contrary, manifested a vivacity and eagerness almost unnatural in a charger, that had been ridden over a hard-fought battle field during the whole of the preceding day. The tossing of his head, the champing of his bit, the pawing of his forefeet was incessant, while as he ever and anon arched his neck, the moonbeams which fell upon his eyes discovered there a fire which, combined with the recklessness of action of his body, marked the hot blood then raging in his veins.

"Truly," observed the Monk-Knight, "some demon of necromancy must have entered into your noble steed, De Boiscourt. Few horses come thus out of such an onslaught as that in which we were yesterday engaged. Would that mine were in the same condition to undergo the vast test which

will devolve on both, ere the next rising sun shall have set. Belœil looks as if a dancing Bacchus were in his veins."

"How stupid of me," replied the Baron. "Like you, I have been endeavoring to trace the cause of his excited action, and seeking in vain the solution; but your last remark reminds me. The fact is, Abdallah, that my thoughts have been so exclusively devoted to you and to her, to whom you are only second in my heart, that I had utterly forgotten having given largely of wine to Belœil, on the morning of yesterday, at starting from the camp."

"Of wine!" exclaimed the Monk, with surprise.

"Yes, of wine! and you may imagine how absent I have been, and how completely immersed in my own thoughts; when I add that it was with the very object which has been attained—that of sustaining his strength and impetuosity in the charge."

"Indeed! better then, that the wine of which I have partaken so abundantly, should have been shared with mine," returned the Monk, seriously. "This jaded steed will not, I fear, stand throughout the fatigue of to-morrow, nor is that surprising. He has had more than usual service to his share yesterday, for even before the commencement of the great battle of Tiberias, which we are to conclude this day, had he been, for hours, trampling down and burying his fetlocks in the thickened gore of the Moslem."

"Ha! now I understand; some sudden and secret enterprize was planned by the Grand Master, and you were summoned suddenly to the council. Hence your seeming neglect of your friend."

"Your surmise is correct," returned Abdallah. "A few brief sentences will inform you of all. Know, then, that about two hours before the day yesterday, a messenger came apprises me of the intention of the Grand Master to force the wells of the Saracens at the head of three hundred chosen knights, both of St. John and of the Temple. His instructions were to command my immediate appearance. Quickly as my war-horse, already equipped, could be brought to me, I started at his fullest speed, and joined the warlike array of my comrades. Three hundred camels, provided with skins and other receptacles for water, sufficient to refresh the whole of the Crusaders, before crossing the plain and giving battle to the infidels, were ordered to follow. The point of attack was nearly a mile from Saladin's chief encampment, near the lake. Onward we rushed like an avalanche, and, as we approached the wells, we observed them to be guarded by a force of many thousands. This was no obstacle to the bravery of the Grand Master, who rushed upon them, and dealt out his blows, followed closely by his knights, with a violence and power almost superhuman. But, alas! our efforts were in vain. The Saracen fanatics seemed to be sensible that the safety of the whole army and of their cause depended on our repulse. They fought with determination, and yet not with the reckless valor of the members of the two Orders, whose many acts of heroism excited the admiration and wonder of their foes. Some, after losing their swords and battle-axes in the *mêlée*, threw themselves impetuously forward, and assailed with their mailed fists. Others drew forth the arrows, that were sticking in their bodies, and hurled them back upon their enemies. James de Maike, in particular, mounted on his white and noble charger, performed such prodigies of valor, that when

he fell at last, overpowered by numbers, and mortally wounded; his conquerors knelt over his body and tasted of his blood, not only as a mark of their respect for his bravery, but in the hope that the act might be the means of imparting to them a portion of his superhuman courage. Poor de Maille! with him perished nearly every other knight,—the Grand Master, another Templar, and myself only escaping the fearful carnage of the day."

"Fearful, indeed!" exclaimed de Boiscourt, "and yet, God be thanked, you escaped, my friend."

"The loss was great," returned the Monk; "but greater was the loss sustained by our inability to secure the wells. Had the camels been laden from these, the victory would have been ours yesterday, and Jerusalem saved."

"We shall retrieve the day," replied the young Knight—"Abdallah, you and I shall avenge the past, by carrying carnage, hand in hand, into the midst of the Moslem ranks. But first for our steeds; Rudolph!" turning towards the page, and in a somewhat elevated tone.

"My lord," answered the boy, springing to his feet.

"Are you quite certain that the second flask in your pannier is untouched?"

"Our virgin lady be praised, it is," returned the page, after having shaken the flask for about the fifth time, since the death of Cœur-de-Fer, to satisfy himself of the fact.

"Good, boy, we shall want it presently; tarry yet where you are."

"Ah! these are brave tidings," observed the Monk Knight, exultingly "Now, then, for death or victory to-morrow—Jerusalem saved or Jerusalem lost!"

"Say not death, Abdallah," returned his friend, grasping his arm almost fiercely. "Remember Ernestina."

"The loved of her adoring spouse," said the Monk, slightly affected by the wine, while a deep flush stole, at the sound of that name, over his calm and noble features.

"The wife of a holy Monk—of a father of the Church!" repeated the Baron, in a low but earnest whisper. "Tell me, Abdallah, do you repent your promise? would you recall your pledge?"

"Repent! recall! De Boiscourt; no," answered the Monk, with an intensity of manner he had never before betrayed. "I have promised—I shall fulfill."

"Ha, dear Abdallah—say you so? Repeat it to me. Tell me again that in the event of my fall, the first violation of the monkish vow of forty years, shall be at the feet of my Ernestina."

"De Boiscourt," returned the Monk, even more excited in his tone and bearing. "Who sows the whirlwind must expect to reap the storm. For forty years, as you have said, has the fierce fiend of lust lain dormant within me. Believe not that it was extinct. It only slept. You have studied hard, my friend, to awaken it, and you have succeeded. That Madonna you have painted—that sweet Ernestina must and shall be mine. Since our conversation of the past day but one, my vows have become a burden to me, and should you fall, which God and my deep friendship for you forbid, I shall renounce my vows, and take, as my bride, the wife of my friend. Yes, de

Boiscourt, in the rich lap of the matchless beauty of that divine woman, which I even now see revealed in such perfection as Eve was first created in, will I pour forth the boundless transport of my enduring love."

"What a picture!" exclaimed the Baron, impetuously. "Would that it were now, for I admit no joy, no bliss on earth, so great as that of witnessing the permitted happiness—the intense devotion of her whom we adore, and wear in our soul of souls. If there is anything in man which partakes of the Divine essence it is that. The total sacrifice of self involved in the principle has in it something more than human."

"Abdallah,"—pursued the Baron, inquiringly, his cheek burning with the feverish excitement of his noble soul—"all this you will do, if I fall."

"All, de Boiscourt—more."

"But, recollect," returned the Baron smiling, not unless my fate be certain."

"Ah! fear me not," returned the Monk, composedly; "only as the husband of the Lady Ernestina can I possess her—in madness and in intensity—in all the wild transport of our mutually-desiring souls, will I possess her, but still as my wife. I take no joy in illicit dalliance. Love is the more powerful—the more soul-absorbing, as I conceive the passion to exist, when it becomes divine and purified by the holy rites of the Church."

"And yet you will possess her before those rites have sanctioned the fires that will consume you both?"

"I will; but only in order that Ernestina may revel once more in fancy in the arms of her noble de Boiscourt. That night shall she share again the love of her gallant husband. The betraying dawn shall give her to me unshackled by any tie, and in the unrestrained fulness of her awakened and newaffection The nuptial benediction shall follow, ere another sun goes down; the second night she shall press a second husband to her arms."

"You will renounce your vows, then, if I fall?"

"I have sworn it," replied the Monk.

"And should they accept them not?"

"Then will I, by absenting myself from my Order, prove the deep passion that fills my whole being for your peerless wife, de Boiscourt. Should you unhappily fall, nothing, save death itself, shall keep me from her arms."

The friends clasped each other in warm and affectionate embrace, and during the silence that followed, the minds of both were filled with intense emotion: the one, in the prospect of possessing a woman whose beauty had, for the first time, excited his brain and inflamed his blood; the other, in the anticipation of unspeakable gratification in knowing that the adored wife of his love would not be left desolate in her widowhood, but know even greater happiness in the arms of his friend than she had ever shared with him.

"And now, of this I speak for the last time," said Abdallah, calmly. "Let events guide our future course. If I fall, Ernestina is still your own; yet, say to her in your moments of tenderest abandonment, that even as a brother prizes a grace-adorned sister more than all of womankind beside, so I thought of her, so I adored her. But if, dear friend, the adverse tide of accident be yours, (and some foreboding tells me that to-morrow's sun will darken over the death-slumbering form of one of us,) then will I outstrip the winds themselves to pour the oil of consolation in her soul, and make her

mine for ever. And, though invisible, you shall be present in spirit. Listen, de Boiscourt : no indulgence of our overwhelming passion shall find its vent unless your name be invoked—your image summoned to sanction and approve it. Nay—no, more !” he added, seeing that his friend was about to reply—“ Hark ! the trumpets to prepare for battle.”

And now, throughout those wild and clustered rocks, around and within whose depths the Christian force had passed the sleepless night in dreamy visions of cool streams, and purling brooks, and crystal fountains, only to mock their palates, like the cheating mirage of the desert, rose far and wide the shrill sounds which called them to do battle for the safety of the beloved Jerusalem. The shrill atabals, and camel-mounted drums of the Moslems, responded to the cry, and fast the gathering ranks of either army swelled into the order which had been assigned to them.

“ The full flask, Rudolph,” said the Baron, springing to his feet, “ the untasted Cyprus ; I trust it may be the last I shall taste in Palestine.”

“ God forbid !” replied the page sadly, as he handed the wine. “ Ah ! my lord, why that cruel wish ? Consider the Lady Ernestina.”

“ It is because I do consider her, boy,” said the knight gaily, as after having taken the bottle, he passed it to the Monk.

Rudolph’s look betrayed his surprise.

“ Dear child, should I fall this day I commit you to Abdallah, and to the Lady Ernestina, whom you love so much. You are an orphan, and they will adopt you.”

“ They will adopt me ?” half questioned the boy through his trickling tears. “ Will the noble Monk Abdallah then live with the Lady Ernestina ?”

“ As her confessor,” returned the Baron, impressively, while he cast a look, full of meaning, on his friend. “ Well, Abdallah, now that we have again cooled our thirst and warmed us for the combat, let not our noble steeds be forgotten. Rudolph, the other flask.”

The page handed the flask which had been first opened, and into this the Baron poured half the contents of the other. He then, as he had done on the preceding morning, applied the flask to the mouth of the Monk’s steed thrown upward, and held tightly by him while he emptied nearly two-thirds of the contents down his throat. The remainder he gave to Belœil.

Thus prepared, the two Knights drew tighter the loosened fastenings of their steeds, adjusted their own armor, and after having again embraced each other with warmth, mounted into the saddle, and separated to join their respective troops. As De Boiscourt watched the departing form of Abdallah, he perceived that his steed, like his own, was already beginning to feel the exhilarating effect of the wine, a portion of which had been given to Blondin, for his course to the point where lay the Knights of St. John was marked by a life and earnestness of action, greatly in contrast with the fatigue and sluggishness he had evinced almost until dawn.

“ God bless and preserve you this day !” murmured the Baron, when, after having lost sight of his friend, he turned his charger in the direction of his own man.

CHAPTER XII.

WHILE the Baron and the Monk-Knight are preparing to engage in the struggle in which the fate of Christendom in Asia depended, let us for a moment transport the reader in imagination to the far-distant chateau of the former, in sunny Auvergne, where lingers in her widowhood the subject of their deep interest and conversation—the Lady Ernestina.

It was night—that very night when the friends held their glowing converse in the heart of the rocks that swept around Tiberias. A large wood fire blazed on the hearth of the outer chamber which adjoined the bedroom, and to which allusion has been already made. The furniture was in keeping with the age. The wooden panels of dark and polished oak—the massive tables, and high-backed chairs of the same material, were elaborately carved, the latter bearing, within a scroll on their backs, the arms of the de Boiscourts. The windows were Gothic, and shaded by curtains of rich red velvet, bordered with embroidery, which threw a cheerful though softened light over the otherwise sombre apartment. The floor, polished like the furniture, was formed of thin small inlaid blocks of wood of an octagon shape. The luxury of a carpet was unknown, but small neat mats, made of stained rushes, and bordered with fringe of the same color with the curtains, were distributed about the room. Against three sides of the chamber were placed as many enormous mirrors of polished steel, set in frames of ebony, richly carved and emblazoned also, and extending from the ceiling to the floor. These, with a high-backed, sloping, and rather ample arm-chair, and a richly-ornamented *escritoire*, composed the principal furniture of the apartment. The bedroom was furnished in a similar manner, with the addition of a large bedstead of ebony, from the ample top of which depended hangings of red also. The door of communication was on the right of the black marble tiled hearth.

The Lady Ernestina entered the first chamber, with a silver lamp in one hand and a bundle of parchment in the other. She placed the former on the table which was nearest the *fauteil*, and, with a pre-occupied but by no means dissatisfied air, approached the fireplace, and leaned her head thoughtfully against the mantel. Her figure, in that attitude, was imposing. Measuring at least five feet six inches in height, she was moulded in the most exquisite style of female proportion. Her waist, although not particularly small, was in exact harmony of grace with her swelling hips, which displayed themselves symmetrically at every movement of her body. It was evident that her leg was superb, for the short petticoat which, in accordance with the fashion of the day, she wore of rich velvet, bordered with lace of the rarest kind, suffered a portion of its symmetry to be seen. This, at least what was seen of it, as she leaned forward against the mantel-piece, was of exquisite fulness and formation. Her foot was a perfect model, so rounded and delicate

were its lines of curvature, and in the black velvet sandals which she wore with rosettes, tightly laced around the taper ankle, would of itself have quickened the blood of the most ascetic. Nor was her hand more deficient than her foot in the smallness and elegance of its proportions. The fingers were taper, and tipped with nails of a pink color, which contrasted pleasingly with the whiteness of her skin. Her arm was a study for the sculptor. It was round, full, smooth, and of exquisite proportion, which the full short sleeve of her crimson bodice, trimmed with the same embroidery as that on the jupon or petticoat, admirably set off and developed. Her bosom, half seen above the low-cut bodice, and also of an *éblouissant* fairness, was full and streaked with purple veins of such clearness that they resembled the soft blue of an Italian sky visible at intervals in the white and fleecy clouds of autumn. This was a portion of her enchanting beauty which the Lady Ernestina well knew was a *chef d'œuvre* of Nature, for, with the exception of the gossamer-textured lace, no pains had been taken to shadow or conceal it. Her throat was white and of swan-like grace of motion—her chin dimpled—and her nose strictly Grecian in its character. Her eyes were blue, large, and expressive, and conveyed the feelings of the woman whose heart is the abode of the warmest and most generous feelings of her sex. Her eyebrows were full and arched, and of somewhat lighter color than her hair. This latter was of a dark rich chestnut, and exceedingly luxuriant and glossy. It was folded many times, in a sort of club, round the back of her head, and where the mass turned upwards from her beautiful neck, not a straggling hair was to be seen. When the whole was loosened, and suffered to fall by its own weight, it exhibited a redundancy not to be exceeded even in the long-haired daughters of Spain, for as it spread itself wide over the polished back and shoulders, it preserved the same fullness until it reached the calf of the leg. To crown all this dazzling beauty, the Lady Ernestina had very white teeth, and a mouth so sweetly, tenderly, yet chastely voluptuous in its expression, that the blood of the listener thrilled as he drank in the soft and melodious accents that flowed from it tremulously, and as if half distrusting their own power. She was in the fully-budded flower of womanhood—at that age when passion is, with the refined in feeling, not the gross sensuality which priests pronounce it to be, but a divine emanation from the God who created woman, that he might have the delight of contemplating the intensity of emotion he had implanted in the bosom of the last and most perfect of his creatures. The Lady Ernestina was five-and-twenty—that voluptuous age when, in the sex, the passions first attain the perfection of development; and seven of these years had she been the adored wife of a husband who loved her with such intensity that his imagination was ever seeking to infuse some new and exciting idea into her soul.

For a few minutes the Lady Ernestina, with a bosom heaving, and a cheek glowing from her own thoughts, raised her head from her supporting arm on the mantel, and with the parchment scrolls in her hand,

approached the table on which she had placed the lamp. Selecting one of these which, from the newness of the silk which encircled it, appeared to be the most recent of arrival, she untied the cord and unfolded it. As she read, the blood mounted still higher on her cheek, and her full bosom heaved as if it would have burst asunder the stomacher which covered it. She read to the close, and then she pressed the parchment warmly to her lips. This done, she deposited it for a moment at the side of the others; then, with fervently clasped hands and eyes upraised to Heaven, suffered tears of intense happiness to course down her cheeks and trickle upon her lap. When this delicious paroxysm of silent but tearful joy was over, a voluptuous calm crept over her features, and she again took up the letter, which, the more to impress the value and sweetness of its contents upon her memory, she read aloud to herself. Thus ran that part which the most affected her:

"Still, amid all the privations I endure at being so long absent from the arms of the beloved of my heart, I am much consoled not only by the recollection of what the great beauty and the goodness of my Ernestina are, but by the thought that another than myself—a noble and a matchless other—shall know that goodness and that beauty also. Who holds a gem of price, and fails to show its dazzling lustre to his friend, that he may share in worship of its value, is most selfish and unworthy to possess the treasure. That am I not. Ernestina, dear Ernestina, does not your woman's fancy paint the ardor of the powerful, the majestic Abdallah, to whom I speak of you in such glowing terms, that the chaste calm Monk, whom passion has never yet seduced to woman's mystic love, half maddens secretly with thoughts his vows disown? If not as yet, then straightway do. Imagine *him*, when your loving Alfred is no more, losing all reverence for his monastic pledge, and fiercely wooing, with noble brow and countenance serene, unto your nuptial bed—not as one hackneyed in the world's cold ways, that turn the holiness of passion to the brutal lust of beasts, but as an impersonation of all the divine fire that filled the father of our race, when first the adored God unveiled to him the peerless beauty of his last created and desiring Eve.

"You, who so well can know and judge my thoughts, dear Ernestina, sweet friend and sole possessor of my faithful heart, can feel with me the luxury of that most holy confidence which, yearning to impart in the ravished ear of each the most secret workings of the soul, whispers forth, with trembling words and burning looks, such wanderings of the imagination that soul entwines with soul in mystic bonds, no time, no accident can weaken or efface. Knowing this, loved Ernestina, you sweeter half of our united one, make then your lesser half your friend and confidant. Confide to me the dear, dear secret of your bosom. Tell me, that although you love me, as well I know you do, with all the energy of a devoted heart, you scarcely love Abdallah less;—say that your trusting soul has been so tutored to a new delight, that it has gently opened to receive a second husband, and swells with joyous pride to think its aliment of love sufficient for them both. Confess that now to

dwell on this, and now on that, until the beating pulses riot in the very thought of bliss your caresses can yield to both, is what your generous fancy mostly likes to dwell upon. Even did the manners of the times at home restrain the free indulgence of the sweetest bliss that Heaven can yield to man, let us but take example from the Moslem race, in all religious practices more strict than ours. In this, the Holy Land, a dozen wives at least adorn each chieftain's tent, and yield him solace from the toils of war. Then think, if such privilege be taken by that ruder sex, which arrogates the sole right of infidelity to one, how worthier and all devoid of wrong is she—the delicate and fair—who presses to her throbbing heart the friend of her only liege who urges her to happiness. Perish the hope of future peace with me when my fond soul finds not gladness in the thought that the all loveliness of my Ernestina shall be as freely abandoned to him who best can prize it, as to myself. 'Twere worse than agony to think Abdallah should not share the sweetness of your affections, even as I, beloved, have shared it.

“Tell me, sweet Ernestina, that this is no strange picture which I draw for you—tell me that, in the lonely hours of night, you think of him—that chaste but still desiring Monk-Knight of St. John—that in your dreams you yield and take such happiness in his loving arms, as in your waking hours you pine to find is but a cheat. Tell me that, when your beauteous limbs lie restless in your widowed sheets, your sweet and parted lips pronounce his name with mine, and that in thought—for what of ill from simple thought can spring?—you press the holy warrior in your arms, in thankfulness for deeds performed in favor of your spouse.

“Much, as you know, have I studied to enslave Abdallah to your charms. It is with me great source of joy to think that fate, forbidding by my death all hope of fond re-union with my Ernestina, he the loved friend—the sharer of my toils and of my heart's affection, should surfeit him in the fulness of your gorgeous love, and so succeed me in his lavishment of adoration, that thought of me should not be source of anguish to your soul, but bring with it most sweet and soft remembrance of the past.

“As yet, the holy Monk-Knight ventures not to speak the feelings which the painting of your excellence creates, but though his eye is calm, and the high and placid brow, and much benevolence and dignity of look, would tell the stillness of his heart, there is an under-current rising, which soon will swell into an overboiling stream that nought can stay, until it overleaps the strong barrier of chastity itself. Say what he may in virtue of his vows—act as he deems most rigidly in keeping with his monkish character, the pulses of Abdallah are swelling with a growing fire for you, that will soon or late burst from its cells, and like the wild blast consume wherever it descends. I watch with care the moment of explosion, and thus it is I wish you to convey to me in truthful language your fullest evidence of regard for him—your desire to become his wife—and his alone, should the blood of your Alfred, as much I think it will, help to fatten the corpse-filled fields of Palestine. What

next results from this my dear, dear Ernestina shall know. In the mean time God and the Virgin preserve you in all health and loveliness."

The Lady Ernestina became more and more excited with each succeeding line of this remarkable letter. She folded the parchment carefully, and replaced it on the table. Then rising, she sank on her knees before the fauteuil, and with clasped hand and with eyes upturned to Heaven, wept abundantly, almost hysterically. For nearly twenty minutes she remained thus. At length, when the excess of her deep emotion for her adored and generous husband had passed away, she rose, seated herself in the chair, and again clasping her beautiful hands and upraising her eyes to Heaven, luxuriated more calmly in the indulgence of the feelings by which she was beset. Never did woman experience such deliciousness of rapture. Her being thrilled throughout every pore with a dreamy voluptuousness not to be described, and varied and pleasing were the different phases of her intoxication of soul. Now she felt subdued into a tenderness that caused her tears to flow as if her whole frame was about to dissolve in softness—and now, excited by the more stinging passages of the letter she had just read, she became so animated at the knowledge of having infused in the Monk a burning desire for her beauty, that the blood mantled deeper on her cheek, as, in imagination, admitting him to the guarded and holy cloister of her love, she murmured forth his name in a delicious abandonment of expression. Her husband's letter had been written with a view to excite her, and it had succeeded in the object. The Lady Ernestina was no married virgin to misunderstand the nature of the overwhelming happiness he had provided for her in the event of his own fall, and she inwardly and deeply gloried in the possession of charms, which, if the mere description of them could so affect him, she well knew would carry madness to his heart, when fully unveiled. Passionate feeling crept over her—she thought tenderly, fondly of her adored—the generous, the noble husband, to whom her pleasure and her happiness were far dearer than his own, but her imagination—the imagination of the wife conversant with love in all its phases—was even more vividly impressed with the Monk—the wedded of the Church—the apostle of Christ; in a word, the stern and indomitable warrior, who rejecting all other women, and ignorant of the mystic character of their sex, still pined for herself. Her feeling was the more intense, not only because de Boiscourt wished this, but because her own gentle heart, encouraged by his sanction, and freed from all artificial restraint, found joy in almost deifying the man who, in thus manifesting his general insensibility to the fascinations of women, so eminently exalted herself.

The Lady Ernestina rose from her chair. She took a small silver bell from the *escritoir*, and going to the entrance of the outer chamber, rang it gently. She then returned to the table, took up the parchments, and with the exception of that which she had just read, tied them up together and deposited them in a drawer of the *escritoir*. This she locked,

and removing the key, placed it in one of the embroidered pockets that adorned her skirt.

Soon a beautiful and blooming girl of about sixteen entered the room, neatly dressed, with dark, long-fringed eyes—hair of the same jetty hue, white and even teeth, a countenance full of softness, and features that in their regularity defied all criticism. She was of middle height, rounded in figure, but not so harmoniously moulded as her mistress, whom she now respectfully but not servilely accosted—

"Did not my lady ring?" she asked in a voice of much sweetness.

"I did, dear Henriette. I would retire. I know not how it is, but I never felt so lonely since my lord's departure, as I do to-night. I pine for something to press against my aching heart, and still the tumult that is there. You must sleep with me, child."

"Sleep with my lady!" said the blushing girl, to whom the privilege had never before been accorded.

"Even so, dearest—you shall nestle in my bosom like a cherub, and on your sweetness I will bestow my love."

"Thinking it is my lord," said the girl, tremulously; then, as if conscious that her lips had uttered what her sense of right condemned—she added hastily, "My lady received letters from the Holy Land methinks to-day. Is my lord in health?"

"He is, my pet, in perfect health and kindness to me. But ah! that tell-tale blush, my Henriette. You would ask of Rudolph. He too is well, and sends his love to both."

"Oh, I don't care about him," confusedly replied the blushing girl.

"Fie, Henriette," and she clasped her hand with intense fondness—"you care a little for my Alfred. Confess, confess your secret to me. In me you will not find a jealous wife to chide you. De Boiscourt's heart is generous, open as the day, and well may justify your love. I'll spare a corner in it to you."

"Ah, dear lady," exclaimed the astonished girl, dropping on her knees and covering the outstretched hand of the Lady Ernestina with mingled tears and kisses—"how shall I repay this goodness? Yes, you have divined my secret. I love the noble Baron—but love him as a sister should."

"Nor shall your love be vain, sweetest. Now rise, dear Henriette. When you lie nestling in these arms, and your sweet face is pillowed on my shoulder, then shall we speak of this. Now to undress me, which service being performed, I shall alike do handmaiden for my Henriette."

The Lady Ernestina stood before one of the large mirrors of the dressing-chamber, and as now her bodice, and now her skirt, and then in slow succession each article of drapery fell, under the hands of her charming assistant, from her beauteous form, she offered a picture of ravishment to the blushing girl, that not the strong timidity of her nature could prevent her heart from beating, or her lips from caressing the galaxy of charms which dazzled her.

"Ah, my dearest lady," she murmured, "how beautiful you are. Yet something is wanting still to complete the picture of your loveliness. Let me unloose the full volume of your speaking hair. Let me behold for the first time the perfection of grace in one of my own sex."

"Flatterer!" said the Baroness, as she smiled her consent, and looked tenderly upon the mirror, while the gentle Henriette, with flushed cheek and trembling hands, and feelings new and indescribable, proceeded to unfasten the club, secured on the back of the head by three strong exquisitely wrought golden pins, so fashioned and arranged as to compose a *fleur-de-lis*. At length that greatest and most exciting ornament which God has given to the most favored of His daughters, was deprived of its support, and fold after fold tumbled heavily, uncoiling itself as it fell, until the extremities of the wavy whole rested within the hollow of the knee.

"Oh, how magnificent!" exclaimed the gratified girl, as she passed the silver comb through its meshes to lengthen them. "Dear Lady Ernestina, I know not why or how it is, but my delight, ever since I can remember, has been for such a head of hair as yours. How I love it!" she added passionately, "how I love her who possesses it."

"More than Rudolph, sweetest?" and the Baroness imprinted a glowing and affectionate kiss upon the forehead of the enthusiastic girl.

"Oh yes! more than Rudolph—more than any body else in the world. I adore your beauty. I worship it, and it does good to my soul. It confirms my faith. It tells more forcibly than can the words of priests, that but one sole and undivided God—one matchless and unapproachable Architect—one comprehensive Will, could have framed a being of such perfection of beauty as yourself."

Struck by the singularity of the young girl's language, the Lady Ernestina regarded her earnestly. Hitherto she had always looked upon Henriette as a mere child, but here was evidence of a mind of extraordinary depth and feeling. The gentle but ardent girl seemed conscious that she had betrayed herself, for when she remarked the fixed and inquiring expression of the Lady Ernestina's eye, her own fell beneath it, and her cheek became crimson.

"Enthusiast!" said the Baroness, half-seriously, half-laughing, "then you half wish that you were Rudolph, and Rudolph you."

"No, no, dearest lady, for I am quite sure I should not love you so well were I Rudolph, as I do now as Henriette de Gaston—and why, oh why, should not one woman love, as passionately as a man, what God has made so perfect in another?"

"You will know the difference when Rudolph returns to make you his wife," said the Lady Ernestina, kissing her; "and yet methinks there is reason in your remark. Why should not one woman love another as intensely as a man? The result is not the same, but the sentiment is the stronger from the very tenderness of our natures, and our exclusive devotion to it. And now, loved Henriette, let me be *your* handmaiden."

Soon the young girl, upon whom she lavished much tenderness and

admiration, as she unrobed her, stood, like herself, covered only with the short and snow-white tunic, on which reposed the full tresses of her dark hair, rendered more strikingly ample by the contrast.

The charms of the youthful Henriette, although not to be compared with those of the Baroness de Boiscourt, were still singularly attractive, and, as they stood side by side, they might have been assimilated, the one to the mother of Love, conversant with its mysteries, the other to a novice seeking initiation.

"And now to bed, dearest," said the Lady Ernestina, affectionately "I am really tired, and fain would pillow my head upon your shoulder."

"Dear lady," urgently entreated Henriette, looking imploringly into the eyes of the Baroness, "you have conferred one great favor upon me. Will you permit me to ask another?"

"Ask, child. I am sure I can refuse you nothing—not even a little corner in a nearly wholly pre-occupied heart."

"Thank you for that too, Lady Ernestina, but I have yet another boon to ask."

"And that is ——"

"That you will leave your hair down all night, even as it is now. I will dress it so neatly for you in the morning, if you do."

"Willingly, my love," returned the Lady Ernestina, "if that will please you;" and then again, struck by this new proof of the singularity of mind of the young girl, she pressed her once more tenderly to her heart and kissed her forehead.

They were in bed. The lamp was left burning, and shed its dim light over the apartment. Henriette had thrown the thick veil from the head of her mistress, and then nestled closely in the arms that encircled her. What picture more beautiful! Many and many an expressive kiss they exchanged, and when later the Lady Ernestina awoke from her restless slumber, her lips might be heard to pronounce softly, and in broken accents, the name of Abdallah.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER sultry dawn, gave earnest of the heat that was to oppress the hosts of Christ and of Mahomet, when the sun should appear like a ball of fire above that vast and sandy plain, the one drawn up in battle-array, and awaiting the onslaught with refreshed lips and re-invigorated limbs, and confidence in their vast superiority of number; the other, filled with frantic zeal, and upheld by that strange, wild enthusiasm which the very thought of losing the prized Jerusalem was so well calculated to produce and foster, yet, drooping, fainting at every step, from the fierce thirst that almost mad-

dened them. But not the safety of Jerusalem was now the immediate object they had in view. Each man of that grim and embattled host, resolved to force a passage to the lake to quench the burning fever of his blood, even though hecatombs of their own force should fall, in forcing a passage through the Moslem ranks. Awhile they stood face to face, as if desiring, yet fearing the issue of the encounter. But as they gazed, the hatred of each for the other became so intense, that suspense became unendurable.

As the sun rose above the still and cloudless horizon, the Christians, with loud and fearful shouts, which rent the air for miles around, rushed upon their detested foes, whose trumpets, drums and atabals answered to the fierce defiance a fiercer defiance still. The most prodigious efforts were made. Each army felt that the ascendancy of their own creed—the triumph of Christianity or of Moslemism—hung upon the events of that day, and with equal fury, equal obstinacy, they contended for victory.

The mailed knights carried death everywhere into the foemen's ranks, and their swords and battle-axes literally rained blows upon the heads of the Saracens to whom they were opposed. Already had they half succeeded in forcing their way through the dense mass that opposed them, when a wild cry of triumph rose from that part of the field where the host of inferior knights and men-at-arms, and other foot soldiers were the most hotly engaged. They had commenced their assault with a fury not to be surpassed, but faint, weak, wholly unable to cope with the more vigorous Moslems, could make no impression on their battle order, but fell in thousands before the gleaming scimeter which mowed them down, even as dried grass before the scythe. Dismayed at their loss, and despairing of success, they forgot their resolution to reach the lake or perish in the attempt, and turned and fled. Great was the carnage which ensued. The swords and arrows of the Moslems were dyed in the blood of tens of thousands of the discomfited Christians, many of whom, flying for safety to some precipitous rocks in the immediate neighborhood, were savagely hurled from their lofty pinnacles upon the plain below, and crushed into masses of shapeless flesh. It was the wild cry of the victors in pursuit that now attracted the attention of the Knights of the Temple and of St. John, at the very moment when they had looked upon their own share of the success of the battle as complete. Discouraged at the sight, they still continued the contest, but the Moslems perceiving their success at the other extremity of the battle, gathered new courage, and reinforced by masses detached by Saladin for the purpose, checked their further advance. Here the action now became terrific. Thousands upon thousands of the choicest of the Moslem warriors fell beneath the renewed onslaught of the indomitable Knights; but human courage, even here assuming the semblance of something more than that of mortals, could not resist successfully the immense masses which surrounded and pressed them into a compass, where they could not act without injury to each other. Hundreds upon hundreds of slain Knights, with their steeds, crimsoned the field with the most valiant blood of Christian Palestine, until their numbers became so thinned, that further resistance was regarded, not only as hopeless, but even impossible, for the daring Saracens, with upthrown shields, received the descending blows, so that they were finally made prisoners and disarmed.

The rout was now complete. A lowering gloom had gathered round the Cross.

From the commencement of the second day of the fatal battle of Tiberias, de Boiscourt had given instructions to his lieutenant, de Pusey, a brave and discriminating officer, how to conduct his men in the event of his fall, or separation from them. It was not, therefore, without a sentiment of satisfaction at his foresight, that he found himself actually borne, in the confusion of the conflict, and by the fierce impetuosity of the excited Beleil, who seemed to sniff that air of blood with delight, toward the gallant array of the knights of the Order already named. Singling out the standard of St. John, he succeeded in cutting his way through to the side of Abdallah, whose steed was also snorting with a wild and unchecked fury, while his rider either decapitated, or severed, limb after limb, Saracen after Saracen, with each stroke of his sharp and heavy scimeter. Urging his horse to the side of his friend, and thus mingling his battle with that of the White Cross-Knights, the gallant young Frenchman rendered himself even remarkable, where each was remarkable for his prowess and fearlessness of danger.

At the moment when the cry of the Moslems announced the defeat of the Christian array on their left, both he and Abdallah had stayed their arms to behold the cause. The sight of that scene was sufficient to decide them. Both saw, at a glance, that the only hope of retrieving the fortunes of the day, was by forcing a passage and coming round, like a sweeping avalanche, upon the pursuing Moslems, whose diversion in their own defence could alone afford the flying Christians an opportunity to recover from their panic, re-form their squadrons, and renew the battle.

"To the front—to the front!" shouted Abdallah, in full, clear tones; and heedless of the presence of the Grand Master of the Templars, who had the whole of the knights in command.

"Where Abdallah leads, there, by St. Denis, will the Baron of Auvergne closely follow."

"God, and the Lady Ernestina!" cried Rudolph, obeying a signal of the Monk-Knight, and spurring up his Blondin between him and de Boiscourt.

"God, and the Lady Ernestina!" repeated the Monk, in a voice of thunder. "Knights of St. John and of the Temple, forward!"

Up to this moment, from the time the Saracen shouts of victory had reached their ears, there had been a sort of suspension of the battle at this immediate point, but when the Monk-Knight first broke the temporary and comparative truce, the contest was renewed in all its fierceness. Half-maddened with wine and excitement, the steeds of the fiends, which each succeeding moment rendered more impatient of the curb, now frantically leaped forward, obedient to the spur, the rowels of which were buried in their flanks, and crushed in their progress what their riders left unwounded and unslain. Right and left, the scimeter of Abdallah, and the battle-axe of the Baron, hewed a passage for their comrades, while the page, who was so placed as to be incapable of making any use of his weapons, was protected in front by the shields of the knights, and in the rear by the closely following body of the different Orders. But just as the gallant band had forced their way to the last lines of the Moslem rear, and all seemed to evince certainty of

success, two strong divisions of horsemen came sweeping from each flank, and pressed upon the centre. Abdallah's quick ear caught the thunder of their tread, as they scoured like a tempest through the lane that had been formed for them a little in his front; but shouting out that the enemy were attempting to cut them off in their advance, he and de Boiscourt, whom he had warned of the danger, again dug the rowels into the withers of their steeds, who, furious with pain, seemed rather to fly than to run their maddened course.

A cry from Rudolph arrested the Monk-Knight. He checked his steed with such an iron hand, it threw him upon his haunches. Close at his left side lay the page, wounded in the shoulder, his Blondin's skull laid open with a scimeter. Quick as thought, Abdallah threw his shield over the defenceless boy, and, seizing him by the belt that confined his light armor, raised him to the front of his saddle, where he bade him cling tightly; then, once more extending his shield so as to cover them both, he again, and with greater fury than ever, plunged his spurs into his foaming steed, whose dilated nostrils seemed to emit sparks of fire, and so well did he wield his weapon, and so completely did he awe those who immediately disputed his passage, that the last bound of his steed carried him unharmed over the final barrier, and into the open plain. Many a sword, many an arrow rang on his coat of mail as he fled, for flee he did, in imitation of de Boiscourt just before him, when, as turning to see how far they were supported, they beheld the fearful massacre of their comrades by the clouds of horsemen that had hastened to intercept them.

Not one hundred yards in their front was the glassy Lake of Tiberias, on which the sun's rays fell dazalingly, likening its surface to a wide-spread sheet of molten gold. Towards this the generous steeds of the warrior knights now sped their way, with a rapidity of motion unexampled. The excitement produced by the strange beverage which had, so happily however, been administered to them, still continued to buoy them up, and to infuse into them a spirit which soon left far behind the band who were detached in pursuit; but such was the raging thirst that dried up their palates, that the proximity of the water acted like electricity on their blood, and, with loud neighings and pricked ears, they bore their riders gallantly on. The lake was reached through straggling Moslems, who vainly sought to arrest their course. The steeds plunged furiously in to their very girths, and drank deeply; nor were the riders themselves less pleased at their attainment of that of which they had been so long and so cruelly deprived. Regardless of the mass of enemies who were rushing down upon them, De Boiscourt unfastened his helmet, half filled it from the lake, and gave it to the Monk-Knight, who, still encumbered with the body of the wounded Rudolph, had only his sword-arm at liberty. The latter tasted of the water, and was greatly revived. When the Monk himself had drank, he returned his helmet to the Baron, who was even then in the act of applying it to his lips, when a loud shout, accompanied by the trampling of many horses' feet, fell upon his ear, and, at the moment, a swift arrow struck the loosely-held helmet from his hands into the lake. Rapidly impelled by its own weight, it sunk to the bottom, leaving De Boiscourt solely to the protection of his

shield. There was little hope of escape, for a complete host of Moslems were now close upon their flanks, diverging forward to the shore of the lake. As soon as they effected this they halted, and half a dozen stalwart horsemen—all men of note—moved forward, to make prisoners of the knights.

"Hold bravely on, Rudolph!" shouted Abdallah, raising his shoulders, and rushing upon his nearest opponent.

His terrible scimeter fell upon the neck of the man, and cleft him to the groin, then through the saddle, and backbone of his steed, which, with his rider, sank exhausted and dying under the blow.

"God, and the Lady Ernestina!" cried the Baron, rushing on the next Saracen, utterly reckless of life, but resolved not to perish unrevenged. With his beautiful hair floating in the wind, and his cheek flushed with excitement, and looking more like Apollo than Mars, he rushed upon the rapidly-advancing horseman. The latter, seeing the knight unhelmeted, paused for a moment in surprise, but soon recovering his self-possession, he aimed an upward blow at the arm which supported his shield. The Saracen was about to follow up his advantage, when the active Baron, having renewed his guard, furiously rose in his stirrups, and cleft him through his head-armor from the crown to the shoulders. One half of the ghastly, yet bloody and horrible head, fell to the earth, and rolled over and over, De Boiscourt with closed teeth consigning it to all the powers of hell.

"Gallantly done, De Boiscourt," exclaimed the Monk-Knight, advancing to the rencontre with a third Saracen knight, scarcely inferior in Herculean proportions to himself. "God and the Lady Ernestina. Let the accursed Saracen feel the true edge of our steel."

With one rapid side movement, he evaded a heavy blow aimed by his adversary, then, quick as thought, and before the other, borne down by the force of his own unopposed blow, could recover the use of his sword arm, dealt such a lightning and horizontal sweep of his sharp scimeter, that he clove the man literally in twain. The upper part of the mailed body tumbled heavily to the ground; the lower was so firmly seated in the saddle, that, as the terrified horse turned round and galloped from the destroyer of his master, he exhibited to the astonished Moslems the appalling sight of a human body, from the navel downwards, dripping with gore, and centaur-like, glued to its flying steed.

A moment afterwards, recovering from their consternation, in which, however, was mingled deep respect and admiration for the prowess of the knight who had accomplished so extraordinary a feat, the whole mass of cavalry moved forward to surround and take him prisoner. It happened that, at the very moment when he swept his scimeter in the manner last described, Rudolph had slipped from the shoulder of his steed to the ground. Upon seeing this, De Boiscourt came up to the succor of the boy, but even while in the act of leaping from his saddle to pick him up, another arrow entered his chest, through a slight rent in the chain armor which, it has been already said, he wore, and laid him motionless by the side of the page.

The horror, the distress of the latter, may well be imagined. Uttering loud lamentations, he threw himself wounded, as he was, upon the body, and wept and shrieked as though he stood in the presence of familiar and pitying

friends like himself, and not in that of a ruthless enemy. Even these, however, were deeply touched by the scene, and again there was a pause in the fierce encounter.

"Revenge!" shouted the Monk-Knight, in a voice almost supernatural from concentrated rage. "Ernestina and De Boiscourt, revenge!"

Madly he dashed through those with whom he was already maintaining the unequal conflict, then, giving the uncurbed rein to his steed, he absolutely rode down his opponent, and then, suddenly throwing the animal on his haunches, trampled him to death with his heels until he became an undistinguishable mass.

Aroused by the shrieks of Rudolph, for he had had his back turned to De Boiscourt at the moment of his fall, a glance had been sufficient to assure Abdallah of the manner of his fate. A second glance at once detected the slayer of his friend. The man, whose feathered arrow might be seen sticking in the quivering body of the young French Knight, still held his bow in the position of one who has just discharged his winged messenger of death. It was this Saracen he had now sacrificed to the manes of his friend. Infuriated at the sight, at least fifty Turkish horsemen now closed around, and finally succeeded in making him prisoner, not, however, without an additional loss of, at least, half-a-dozen of their number.

"Unhand me!" commanded the Monk-Knight haughtily, and in Moorish. "Now that I have slain the accursed puller of that bow, I offer no more resistance; let me instantly be taken before Saladin, that I may demand of him honorable burial for the preserver of the life of his wife. Let your wounded boy, be carried, too, before her. She will recognize and obtain for him the protection of your chief."

"What proof of this, Christian?" demanded he who seemed to be the leader of the party.

"Ha! I have it;" returned the Monk-Knight. "Let me but join my friend, and I will show you a jewelled ring on the little finger of his left hand, placed there, in gratitude for the deep service rendered to her ——"

"Stay where you now are, Sir monk," remarked he who had spoken last—a proud and distinguished chieftain, to whom all seemed to do reverence. "We will duly examine into the proof, and if what you say be true, not only shall the rites of sepulture be afforded to the warrior-knight, but this poor youth shall gain the presence of her of Saladin's wives who first admits the claim. Tarry not to bear the corpse along, but well secure that prisoner, and conduct him to the tent of Saladin when the fight is over: the boy will follow with yourself."

Obedient to his command, Abdallah and the inconsolable Rudolph were hurried on to the front where shone the hated Crescent, and loud burst the clang of victory. The gallant the ill-fated de Boiscourt was left even on the spot whereon he fell.

CHAPTER XIV.

In a large and richly-adorned tent, on the evening after the battle of Tiberias, sat on a temporary throne, the great and noble, yet occasionally cruel, Saladin : great and noble, ever ; cruel, as caprice or circumstances disposed him. Historians have ascribed to him artifice, cunning, and extreme bigotry in religion ; but, in disproof of this assertion, may be adduced the strong contrast of his conduct at the subsequent capture of Jerusalem, with that of the Christians, detailed in a previous chapter. On that occasion, there was no pity, no mercy extended by the victorious Crusaders. The streets and temples of the Holy City ran with blood, and carnage became not a necessity, but a passion. But how acted Saladin, when shortly subsequently to the great victory gained by him, he carried the disputed city by storm ? According to a popular author already noticed, who quotes from Bernard, " the conduct of the infidel sultan shamed the cruelty of the Crusaders. When the people could hold out no longer, Saladin, who had at first offered the most advantageous terms, insisted that the city should now throw itself on his mercy."

" He then agreed upon a moderate ransom for the prisoners, and promised to let each man carry away his goods without impediment. When this was done, with extraordinary care, he saw that neither insult nor injury should be offered to the Christians, and having taken possession of the town, he placed a guard at one of the gates to secure the ransom of the inhabitants as they passed out. Nevertheless, when the whole of the wealth which could be collected in the town had been paid down, an immense number of the poorer Christians remained unredeemed. These were destined to be slaves, but Saif Eddyn, the brother of the monarch, had begged the liberty of one thousand of these, and the same number were delivered up at the prayer of the Patriarch, and of Balian de Ibylin, who had commanded in the place, and communicated with the Turkish monarch on its surrender. After this, Saladin declared that his brother and Ibylyn had done their alms, and that now he would do his alms also, on which he caused it to be proclaimed through the city that all the poor people might go forth in safety by the gate of Saint Lazarus ; but he ordered that, if any attempted to take advantage of the permission who could really pay for their deliverance, they should be instantly seized and cast in prison. Many of the nobler prisoners, also, he freed at the entreaty of the Christian ladies, and in his whole conduct he proved himself as moderate in conquest as he was great in battle."

Such was the man who now, amid his chief officers, sat to pronounce judgment upon the Knights of the Temple and of St. John, who, with the Grand Masters of the Orders, had fallen into his hands. Against these proud warriors, Saladin had conceived a most bitter and relentless hatred, not only by reason of numerous acts of cruelty and aggression which had been charged against them, but for the deep measure of their fierce slaughter of his people in the field. This was in strange contradiction with his noble conduct on the fall of Jerusalem, and with his generous admiration of the heroic Cœur-de-

Lion, when, seeing that monarch dismounted, and fighting like a second Achilles, at Jaffa, he despatched to him two horses with the remark that "such a man ought not to remain on foot in so great danger."

The knights stood uncovered, helmet in hand, yet in their armor, and divested only of their weapons. Undaunted by their position, although well knowing the fate that awaited them, they looked proudly up in defiant mood, and if the cheeks of some were pale, and wore a cast of thought, it was not from dastard fears but shame that they, the indomitable warriors of many a battle field, should be compelled at length to stand uncovered in the presence of the infidel they despised and hated.

"Are all the captive Knights of St. John and of the Temple here assembled?" inquired the monarch of the officer who had their safe keeping in his charge.

"They are, your Highness," returned the official, bowing low and deferentially.

"Methinks," cried Saladin, darting his quick stern glance upon the group, "I behold not the warrior-monk, taken near the Lake of Tiberias, at the close of the battle."

"He has declared his willingness to accept your Highness's conditions," returned the man, bending as before, "and, therefore, deemed I not him included in the command of your Highness to produce the prisoners."

"What!" exclaimed the Grand Master of the Templars, in utter astonishment—a sentiment that was responded to, in various ways, by his companions—"Abdallah!—the monk Abdallah!—the flower of our chivalry, an apostate! Abdallah, for the base love of life, renounce his vows, to espouse the damned—the accursed faith of Mahomet! Impossible!"

"Hold, sacrilegious wretch!" exclaimed the infuriated Saladin, rising quickly from his throne, and advancing a few paces; "your most foul and insolent tongue has sealed your doom," and, with one rapid blow of his scimeter, he struck the head of the Grand Master from his shoulders to the ground. At that sudden and appalling sight there was much stir among the prisoners, and many looked threateningly, and dropped their hands to their thighs, forgetful that there was no weapon there to meet them.

"Brave yet doomed knights," remarked Saladin, immediately after this act, and with much dignity, "your power to do harm is, at length, ended. Those swords, so long bathed in the best blood of Palestine, are even now hung up as trophies of your fall. You know the fate that awaits you; the option that is offered. Go hence, and ponder well the subject. Tomorrow's dawn must see you converts to the Moslem faith your haughty chief has dared to slander, or like that"—and he pointed significantly to the body of the Grand Master.

"Our answer here is prompt," replied the Grand Master of St. John, advancing a step or two; "for myself and these I speak defiance to your threat, proud Saracen. No knight is here so recreant in his fall, as cast a shame upon the escutcheon of his Order."

"Nay, by the Prophet, but you scarcely speak less scornful than yon accursed thing, whose vile carcase at your feet should duly warn you. But I heed not your rejoinder; let each separate knight himself decide. Should any

among your cruel and remorseless ranks show cause for mercy in act of grace performed toward a Saracen, that act being proved, shall give you life and liberty. For those who cannot show such plea must be reserved by the scimeter or the true faith. Begone, and by to-morrow's dawn, let all have chosen."

The knights turned haughtily round, and with steady step moved from the tent. It was evident from the manner of each that their course had already been decided on; and Saladin, who watched them keenly, had no doubt of what would be their final answer. But he had an object in what he was doing. Once his sentence should be passed, it was indispensable that execution should follow immediately, and he was desirous of obtaining certain information, which concerned the fate of some of his prisoners, before he pronounced his final determination.

If the heart of Saladin was ardent in war, it was scarcely less powerfully influenced by women. His seraglio always accompanied him in the field, and, at night, in the arms of his chosen and voluptuous wives, he sought solace for the many toils and duties of the day. Zuleima—the fascinating, the matchless Zuleima—was his favorite, the most cherished of his heart—the sharer of his most secret thoughts, feelings, and sympathies. Tired with the copious draughts of sherbet he had swallowed, after the more than ordinary fatigues of the day, and with his blood heated and excited, and pulses throbbing with love, he repaired, soon after his interview with the Christian knights, to her silken and luxuriously-furnished tent, where she lay, half undressed, reclining on a rich ottoman, and expecting his return to render tidings of his victory.

"Ah, my dear lord," she affectionately exclaimed, and half rising to welcome him as he entered; "the Holy Allah be praised, you are again unharmed."

"It must be, sweet Zuleima, that your prayers ward off the death-blow," said Saladin, smiling, as he dropped at her side; "but, in truth, life of my soul, I am, as you say, unharmed. Yet come, dearest, let us not think of the dangers I have passed, but of the happiness I crave of my Zuleima."

Her exceeding beauty, never more beautiful than at this moment, maddened him with a poignant anticipation of the bliss he was about to taste in the arms of his beloved wife. Her head reclined upon his shoulder. She breathed deeply. Her long black hair, which he had loosened from the diamond that confined it, fell upon his face and neck. Fondly, rapturously he pressed his lips to hers. He called her his beloved—his adored—the peerless idol of his existence, and exhausted her with endearments, such as well might come from one of his ardent and generous character.

Recovering from the delicious interchange of their mutual passion, Saladin lay at the side of Zuleima, with one arm thrown around her neck, and his hand extended on high. Carelessly following the action of his playing fingers, the glance of his wife soon rested upon a brilliant which adorned one of these, and which, it seemed to her, he was then thoughtfully regarding. Suddenly she became pale as death, and had Saladin, at that moment, turned his eyes upon her face, he would have discovered evidences of strong and unusual emotion. Her heart, too, beat violently, and various feelings rapidly

succeeded each other through her agitated mind. She was afraid to ask how the monarch had become possessed of the ring, and yet, so great was her impatience to know, that she could not refrain from alluding to events which she hoped might be the means of throwing some light upon the matter.

"Your Highness' victory has been great this day," she at length remarked. "Not only Guy of Lusignan, King of Jerusalem, and your greatest foe, Renaud of Chatillon, but the Grand Masters of the Temple and of St. John, with three hundred knights, are, methinks, your prisoners."

"Even so has Allah befriended our arms," returned Saladin. "The cursed Order of the Temple are nearly all within my power, and after to-morrow's dawn, shall perish by the sword, if they but hesitate to renounce their creed and embrace our own."

"And the Knights of St. John?" tremblingly half questioned the anxious Zuleima.

"They too are our prisoners, and shall perish also," returned the Monarch; "but this reminds me of the mission on which I am partly come. See you this ring, my Zuleima?"

"I do," faltered the Saracen, her heart filled with a dreadful presentiment of some coming evil to herself.

"I took it from the hand of a knight—an unhelmeted French knight, with clustering locks, beautiful as Adonis—who lay dead on the battle-field."

"Dead! said your Highness," returned the almost fainting Zuleima, with difficulty suppressing her tears.

"Dead or dying," was the answer—"at his side lay his page, a sweet young infidel, also, and blooming in beauty, even though wounded. There we were about to leave them to their fate, when a tall, powerful, and daring Knight of St. John, who had slain two of my best officers in a manner that proved the power of his arm to be almost superhuman, addressed me as one of no note, though in command of the party, and demanded that I should lead him instantly before the monarch, while the page should be borne to the tent of his consort, who would not only recognize him, but obtain honorable burial for his master."

"They say truly," exclaimed the excited Zuleima, somewhat consoled by the manner in which Saladin had obtained the ring. They are the noble Christians to which I owe my honor and my life. That ring which you now wear, I gave in gratitude to that ill-fated Knight of France, that it might serve as a protection to him, should he ever fall into the hands of our people."

She then, in a few brief sentences, explained all that had occurred since the moment of her being carried off by Thibaud, up to that of her restoration by the Christian knights to the officer sent in search of the marauders; omitting, however, such portions of her story as she deemed might not be quite pleasing to the ear of her lord and master.

"Dearest Zuleima, forgive my seeming apathy. True, I knew that one of my harem had been carried off and subsequently recovered, but it never occurred to me that it could have been you, and then you know I did not love you as I do now, and so little interest did I take in the rest of my wives, that I had never cared to inquire. I never knew, till this moment, how much

I stand indebted to these Christian knights. Why had you not told me of this before?"

For a moment Zuleima hesitated, and then, burying her face in the monarch's bosom, she murmured—"I wished your Highness first to question me on a matter which involves some strange revelations—nay, start not from me, dearest Saladin. Unhurt, untouched by these vile men, the faithful knights—the Monk-Knight of St. John, and his noble friend of high degree in France—restored me, with my less fortune-favored handmaidens, to the troop of horsemen sent in search of us. There first I saw the gentle youth—the wounded page—whom now, I pray your Highness, send to me, that I may show my gratitude for all the care he lavished on your Zuleima. Him seen, I can no longer doubt the identity of the Christian knight to whom this ring was vainly given."

"At least, from his hand, let it return to yours, my Zuleima. It will yield some solace to your gentle heart, to know that that which circled round the flesh of both, brings life-long memory of the past—of the great, strong service which that brave and gallant knight did render you."

As he spoke, Saladin took the brilliant from his finger and placed it on that of his wife. It would be impossible to describe the feelings that passed through her mind as she felt, once more pressing her own finger, the ring which, placed there by her own hand, had so recently been taken from that of him who had clasped her to a heart burning with a thousand fires, and filled her with an emotion, the sweetest she had ever known.

"Noble, generous lord!"—she exclaimed with deep fervor—"my own monarch and master! well do you strive to infuse into your own Zuleima's heart, lasting joy in your princely nature. The unworthy jealousy of another had fain withheld this bauble from my sight and touch, but you, with your great mind, accord to softened sympathy what sympathy alone can accept or claim."

"Not this alone, my Zuleima," returned Saladin, as he fondly pressed her to his heart; "could I restore the dead, I would bear this gallant Knight of France to hear your lips pronounce your thanks; but since this cannot be, his page shall forthwith answer to your call, and him received, the valiant Monk-Knight, chief agent in your escape from purposes most vile, shall claim the measure of your feeling for his friend."

"What! that cold, stern monk!" said Zuleima, in a trembling voice, which moreover denoted astonishment; "but where shall I receive him? With the page there can be no difficulty, but —"

"You are right, my Zuleima," returned Saladin, smiling, and kissing her brow, as he rose to depart. "It were better far that the untaught page should pour his silvery tones into your ear, and tell you of his hope of protection in your loving favor. You want a young and comely page—mayhap this youth, having lost his master, may change his faith, and enter in your service —"

And thus saying, he left the tent, not, however, without imprinting a final kiss on the crimson cheek of her he so fondly regarded.

CHAPTER XV.

LEFT to herself, the bosom of Zuleima was a prey to the most contradictory feelings, and first among these, was grief for the death of the noble Christian knight, whom she had known under such strange and exciting circumstances. The elegance of his manner, and winning lightness of disposition, had first awakened an interest in his favor, the more strongly marked at the time, by the contrast thus exhibited to the repulsive coldness of Abdallah, and as has been seen, she not only yielded to a temptation too fascinating to be resisted with success by one of her generous nature, but wholly justified to herself by the occasion. Long after her return home, had she lingered nightly in imagination over that scene in the tent of the Christian knight, where first her willing heart consented to reward him with her love. The ring she had given him at parting, she thought would never be missed, while that which he placed on her own hand, she kept carefully secreted among her jewels of price, and only regarded at intervals, whenever her truant thought recurred to those most dear to her within the Christian camp.

In the first moments of her impulsive transports, when filled with the wild delirium of a newly excited passion, she had prayed for its continuance in a request, that the Knight would retain her either as his page or his slave. She had done this not with a view to be guilty of open wrong to her husband, whose love for her then had not attained the pitch we have just shown, but was ever similar to that which he now admitted in regard to the women of his harem generally; but she knew that her absence would be looked upon not as voluntary, but the consequence of forcible abduction, and that a corresponding sentiment would be created. The tender and voluptuous Zuleima was by no means of the common school of eastern women. She felt that which she had done was warranted by the occasion. No one had sustained loss by it; but, on the contrary, two ardent souls had been made supremely happy. Her creed in love resembled, in some degree, that of the Spartans in theft. There was no wrong in the act, it was only in the detection. A wife, in little more than name, she had abhorred that unnatural law of custom which, whether with Christian or infidel, gives to man the possession of many; while woman, with a heart filled with the most exquisite sensibilities God has given to his creatures, is doomed to worse than celibacy—constancy—or the sneers of the tyrant-forgers of those conventional laws which bind her as his slave. She was not licentious; and yet no woman's bosom ever glowed with more voluptuous feelings. Love was a necessity with her, seldom gratified, it is true, but ever richly painted to her ardent and imaginative soul; hitherto she had only committed infidelity in thought. Her first adultery had been with de Boiscourt. He had stirred her soul into excitement, and made her first experience those agonizing sensations of passion of which she was so susceptible. Loving not Saladin, who had only subsequently won her affections by his attentions and generosity of character, she was the more anxious to remain with de Boiscourt, who had first taught her the value of herself; but the refusal of the embarrassed Knight, while it

deeply pained her, had had the effect of subduing much of the intensity of the passion he had inspired, while all the tenderness of recollection remained. Now, her feelings had taken another turn, but for this, also, she was indebted to de Boiscourt. Had she not experienced all the ardor of his love, she never would have acquired the knowledge that was necessary to comprehend that of Saladin, who, seeing her more beautiful—more softened—more captivating than ever, after the occurrence of an adventure with which he had never identified her, threw aside the coldness of customary favor, and warmed his soul into so much love for her, that, on his manly bosom, she breathed forth all those passionate marks of endearment which had, for the first time, been called into life, by the more refined and delicate Christian knight.

Such had been the feelings of the strong-minded, yet tender, Zuleima, up to the moment when Saladin called her attention to the ring. At first, a horrible and unworthy fear of treachery in the young Knight assailed her, but when he proceeded to detail the manner in which he had become possessed of it, her heart was relieved from a mountain weight, and she at once saw how favorable was the opportunity to explain the occasion on which she had bestowed it. Then, too, came tender emotions of regret for the fate of him whom she had once so known, and who had been the first to awaken in her the ardent passion she now entertained for her noble husband.

Had the latter evinced anything approaching to jealousy or distrust, her satisfaction would have been incomplete, but when, so far from this, he, with generous confidence, placed the ring upon her finger, with the very view of recalling to her memory the image of him who had worn it, and doubtless regarded it with some lingering emotion, her mind became filled with a voluptuous, dreamy calm, which was more delicious to her than the tumult of passion itself. In this mood she had been left by Saladin, and continued to indulge in, for many minutes, until the arrival of an eunuch, conducting the wounded and somewhat pale-looking Rudolph, roused her from her reverie.

The boy, wondering where he was, and for what purpose he had been brought to a tent so richly ornamented, threw his eyes rapidly around the interior, but soon they rested upon an object which engrossed all his attention. He could not be mistaken. It was the beautiful Saracen, for whose loss he had shed bitter tears on the morning of her departure from the Christian camp; and yet, how could one so tender, so lovely, be found near such a scene of carnage as had for the last two days been enacted here? The blushing and delighted Zuleima rose from her couch, extended her hand to him, and called him by his name, Rudolph.

On showing in the boy, the eunuch had departed, closing the curtains of the tent after him. Rudolph threw himself on his knees, at the side of the ottoman, and mingled tears of joy with the burning kisses he imprinted on her hand. She put her lips to his brow, and turned pale at the sight of the blood which was encrusted on the shoulder of his light armor; then, ringing a small bell, that lay on an enamelled table at the head of the ottoman, a beautiful female slave appeared to do her bidding.

"Lead this youth, Fatima," she directed, "to my bath-room, and assist him in laying bare this nasty wound. You may well stare. He is rather fashioned to be a lady's pet, than a grim warrior. Be careful that you do

not hurt him, and let all those precious unguents, which the sage Nazareth has prepared to preserve the life of the destined conqueror of this vaunted Christian city of Jerusalem, be laid out, with bandages of the softest texture. Fill the bath with rose-water, and such sweet odors as best are suited to lull the senses to repose. Moreover, bear thither the richest garments of a Moorish page. I will follow shortly to apply the dressings to the wound."

Rudolph heard all these orders, and well understood them, for he had made great progress in the Moorish tongue, under Abdallah, who had taken great pains to instruct him. Obedient to the orders of Zuleima, he followed the charming slave into the room which had been indicated.

When the fair Saracen joined them, his armor had been removed, and his shoulder, white as alabaster, where the blood was not visible, completely bared. At a significant motion, the blushing girl withdrew, secretly wondering at so unusual a care of a wounded Christian, even though a boy.

In a spirit of self-confidence, and strong in the almost maternal interest she took in the boy, Zuleima approached him. She imprinted a kiss upon his brow, and finding, to her great surprise and joy, that he had become quite a proficient in the Moorish language, took pleasure in reminding him of the period when she was a temporary inmate of the noble French knight's tent. But the conduct of Rudolph surprised her, for instead of deriving satisfaction from this, as she intended should be the case, the page could not restrain the tears that slowly trickled down his cheek. Zuleima felt deeply pained at this. Of the cause of his grief she could not be ignorant; and when, after condoling with the boy, she frankly told him that she too deplored the brave young knight's death as deeply as he did, although she dared not yet openly express it, he threw himself, sobbing, in her arms, and said he knew it was impossible for his dear mother to feel such ingratitude as he had unjustly fancied in her.

"Foolish boy," said Zuleima, looking tenderly in his eyes, while her own were dimmed in lustre, "how could you think it possible for me ever to forget that noble knight, when recalled to my memory by the young friend and page who knew and loved him so well? There now, then, get into your bath. When you have finished and dressed yourself, ring that bell, pointing to a small one near, and I will return and dress your wound with my own hands." So saying, she hurried from the apartment, turning round and putting her finger significantly upon her lip, as she passed through the door.

In less than twenty minutes the bell was rung, when Zuleima again repaired to the bath-room. At first she hesitated to enter, for Rudolph, although out of the bath, had no other covering on him than the loose drawers and slippers which had been provided with the remainder of an Eastern page's dress; but the boy implored her so earnestly, both in look and language, to come near him, that she found it impossible to refuse.

"And must I wear that dress, my beautiful, dear mother; must I transform myself from a Christian page into a Saracen?"

"You must, if you love me, as you say you do, Rudolph. It is the only condition on which you can remain near my person. Otherwise, dear child, a place among the Christian captives is allotted to you."

"I confess I do not much fancy the exchange," said the boy, with proud mortification in his look. "It seems to degrade me."

Zuleima looked at him a few moments intently. Never had he appeared to her so strikingly interesting. The fresh bath had revived all his fatigued system. The fragrance of the rose-water seemed to exude from every pore. His flowing and beautiful locks were carefully combed. A more lovely and delicate red overspread his cheeks. The rich ripe blood had mounted into his moist and parting lips; and his large blue eyes now sparkled with deeper vivacity, and now stung with their voluptuous langour of expression. A species of fascination came over Zuleima. She watched the play of his half scornful features, until she fancied that they seemed to reproach her for the change that had come over them, and then a few tears coursed slowly from her still gazing eyes.

"Mother, dear mother, forgive me! I will wear a Moorish dress—do anything to be near you. But ah! I am sure that is not all. With the dress I am expected to assume the creed."

"Even so, Rudolph," murmured Zuleima, through her tears. "The price is a severe one, but Saladin has said it; for none may approach his wife but those of tender years and of his own creed. Rudolph, I love you, as though you were indeed my son, yet far be it from me to persuade you to a course you may hereafter regret. True, it would give joy to my heart, greater than I can express, to have you ever near me, but do no violence to what you consider to be a duty."

"And if I do consent, will you always love me?" eagerly questioned the page.

"Always," she replied. "Even as though you were my child."

The fascinated boy whispered something in her ear, and then buried his burning face in her bosom.

"Yes, yes," she answered, coloring deeply. "Even as such a son should be loved by a tender and confiding mother, proud of the exclusive devotion of him to whom she has given the divine power to feel thus."

Her voice was broken from excessive tenderness, and her hands trembled under the office she was performing. It was that of applying fresh and healing salves to the wound on his shoulder, which now, the incrustation of blood having been removed, was discovered to be but slight.

"Then ten thousand times would I become a Mussulman for this!" exclaimed the animated boy. "Do you know," he continued, his deep blue eyes fixed earnestly, yet languishingly on her, and his cheek covered with the same burning glow, while his voice trembled, as if half fearful to disclose the one absorbing thought of his mind, "I am very young—only sixteen—yet I am what the Monk-Knight would call very wicked. I should not love you as I do, if you did not permit me always to look upon you as my mother. I have never known the love of one; for I was an orphan soon after my birth. But I have always fancied that, were she alive and beautiful, I could dote upon her to distraction. Ah! you will supply her place to me. You will be my own beautiful mother. Say this, and I am your slave for ever."

"You mean my favorite page," returned Zuleima, nearly as much troubled and excited as himself. "But, dear Rudolph, if you are wicked in

this, your Zuleima is not less so. Her soul is ardent, imaginative as your own. It is for the very reason that you feel as you do, that I love you as I do. I adore the bold thought that enters into and fills the mind of one so tender, so delicate, and so beautiful. Do you understand me now, my child?" and she laid an emphasis on the last word, that perfectly intoxicated the boy with delight.

"I do, I do. Oh mother! dear mother! sweet mother!" he faintly aspired, while his feverish hand trembled in hers.

"Yes, always your mother. Never think of me, Rudolph, but as a lost mother at length restored to you after an absence of years. To all the world besides, you shall be my page—I shall be mistress to my page; but in our own secret hearts we shall exult in the fancied affinity that binds them each more strongly to the other."

There was an expression of soft voluptuousness in her whole countenance as she uttered these words, which swelled the bosom of the boy with the most intoxicating feelings.

"One question more," he returned, falling on his knees half-undressed as he was, and devouring her hand with kisses; "Oh, disappoint me not in your answer. Destroy not an illusion which is so necessary to the completion of our happiness."

"And what now?" playfully asked Zuleima. "You really look so serious, Rudolph, that you will make me think you wish me to run away with you, my son, and leave the Sultan, yes, my child, the Sultan whom I so love, but with a love different from that which I entertain for you, to curse the folly which induced him to make me woo you to my service."

"Not so," returned the boy. "I ask not, I desire not, that my own beautiful mother should love her noble husband less than her son. I would not have her so ungrateful—so deficient in fulness of heart. My question has another and a more delightful bearing. My soul yearns to know that your age is such that you could have been my mother."

"Willingly, dear Rudolph. Your mother could not well number less than eight-and-twenty summers of the Christian reckoning."

"Ah! who would have thought it! Scarce twenty do you look—so great, so fresh is your loveliness. But you mock me. Surely you do not mean to say that you are what you state, dearest mother."

"I do, indeed, Rudolph. Were I less, I should scarcely comprehend how to feel for you as I do."

"Ah! what joy," exclaimed the boy, suddenly throwing himself upon the rich carpet at her feet. "You are indeed my mother; and I, with a heart full of fire—a soul overflowing with deep tenderness for you—am your son. Yes, you are my lost mother, returned to gladden me with your adored love. Can you comprehend the fulness, the unutterable fulness of my joy!"

"I do. I share all your wild but beautiful imaginings. Even as to you, so to me, these are sources of the most exquisite bliss."

There was a pause of some moments in their conversation, but their speaking looks were far more eloquent than words.

CHAPTER XVI.

LET no one accuse us of painting scenes more vividly—with a greater warmth of coloring—than they were enacted in the age on which we have drawn for material to show the loose manners of the times. It is pure hypocrisy to draw the veil over those portions of the crusade history more than others. They form an essential clue to the character of the different people of the earth, and show abundantly that the natural feelings, strongly implanted in the breast by the will of the Almighty, were more acknowledged and obeyed then, when the religious mania had spread like a poison throughout the arteries of unpolished society, than now, when many of these dogmas are repudiated by all sensible and reflecting men, as insulting to the majesty of God. And why, because society—that society in which the wise man is compelled to mingle with the fool—the free and untrammelled in mind with the bigoted in spirit—we repeat, because that society did not exist to mar, by its own selfishness, the beauty of God's ordinances. The conscience of every man told him that, under no circumstances, should he wantonly take the life of his fellow, without incurring the bitter anguish of remorse arising from the sacrilege against his Creator; but there were others who ventured to disbelieve, that if the starving wretch who lived by the will and command of his God, should appropriate to himself a loaf from the rich funds of him who hoarded up granaries of food to carry them, figuratively, to his grave, the wrong was towards God, or would be punished by God. In like manner, they could not believe that adultery was a crime in the eyes of Heaven, because they saw that all men committed it, and almost glorified themselves in the act, while on woman it was visited with the utmost severity by their very betrayers. It was difficult to understand how that which was venial in the man, should be criminal in the woman; nor could they comprehend that a great and good God should draw such a line of distinction between the sexes, as to make that virtue in the one which was guilt in the other. Men, then, rather followed the promptings of nature than existing human laws; and the voluptuous and impassioned woman, strong in the right of that which she felt to be her own, seldom gave, as we find in the history of those days, the offspring of the adultery, which was necessary to stimulate her own sense of happiness, the opportunity to determine who was its father. But tyranny, then, under the name of society, had not frained its stringent laws. It had not yet accumulated fortunes, and grown arrogant by the humiliating sale of the most petty articles necessary to human existence. Men had not yet appropriated to themselves millions of acres of that globe which God had given in common to all. They had not asserted their exclusive right to a woman, when her soul was filled with hatred for himself and ungratified passion for another. They had not attained that refinement of cruelty which drives, even from the bosom and affections of nearest relatives, the dear and confiding girl who, yielding to that fulness and tenderness of soul which God had implanted in her for the wisest of purposes, surrenders up at the earnest prayers of the lover she adores, those transcend-

ent, unspeakable charms which are an inconceivable and a beautiful mystery. But all these great atrocities will be no more when the millenium arrives. We feel that we live a century too soon. The world will surely recur to manners somewhat assimilated to those of past ages, as well as to their fashions.

Much intercourse with their conquerors had infused that laxity of morals into the hearts of the Saracen women, which prevailed to so great a degree among the women of the West, of whom (as we have just remarked) it has been said by Mills, a authority not to be questioned, "that considering that the Cavaliers (Knights of St. John) were to be as pure as vestals, it is singular that the chastity of their mothers was not looked to. Legitimacy does not seem to have been a matter of moment. No regulation on the subject was made till the time of Hugh de Revel, who was grand master from twelve hundred and sixty-two to twelve hundred and sixty-eight. The order then enacted that no person could be admitted to the profession, if either himself or his father had not been born in lawful wedlock, except, however, the sons of counts and persons of high rank and quality. Then, again, Joinville, in his History of King St. Louis, asserts that while the French barons, knights, and others, who should have reserved their wealth for a time of need, gave themselves up to banquetings and carousings, their men sated their lusts in the arms of married women and virgins to a fearful extent, and without power in the king to prevent them; and, although he dismissed from his service many of his officers and soldiers, these excesses continued unabated until the aroused Saracens, in their threatening attitude, effected that change which considerations of virtue could not accomplish. Nay, such was the unbridled disposition to gallantry of the Christian women of all ranks, that even the king's wife, Eleonora, divorced from him on that account, and subsequently married to Henry the Second of England, gave such unrepressed indulgence to the reigning passion of her soul, that on whomsoever the lust of her eye fell—Saracen or Christian—she bestowed the rich voluptuousness of her charms, with an abandonment that proved the mysteries of love to be the dominant passion of her nature—the food on which alone she lived. Nor was this remarkable in a woman who had previously decided in a case of appeal in the Provençal courts, that "true love cannot exist among married people," a decision that was strictly in accordance with the principle maintained in those courts, that "marriage is no legitimate bar to the indulgence of love with another."

It is true that all these things occurred after the re-conquest of Jerusalem, and to which period we have introduced the tender Zuleima; but enough had been done by the Christians during a long interval of comparative peace, to instil into the hearts of the eastern women much of the looseness of morals of their conquerors. Even the purest of these, dared not refuse to their sollicitations what they well knew force would be used to obtain if they did, until at length their appetite, growing stronger on what it fed, and gratified by many—not confined to the possession of one master—became almost as marked as that of the women of the West themselves, while their glowing and impassioned imaginations gave to its indulgence, richness of conception

—an endless ideality of object which the less ardent women of the West—pursuing love as much from habit as from inclination, could but ill understand.

In the very heart of these exciting scenes of voluptuous abandonment, Zuleima had been brought up. Before she had numbered ten summers, it had been her fate more than once to behold her more mature companions compelled to the gratification of the fierce lust of their conquerors, while others, yielding to their solicitations, gave free indulgence to their long-suppressed emotions. All this had Zuleima witnessed, until her young blood tingled in her veins, and Nature, knocking loudly at her heart, told her that the strong excitement of her friends was indicative of anything but unwilling sacrifice. Zuleima had remarked this, and yet while happily exempt from the same violence, she entertained no desire to partake of the same free indulgence; yet, as she increased in years, and the full bloom of girlhood succeeded to the novitiate of childhood, her thoughts could not but revert glowingly to the subject, and a deep passion for some imaginary Christian knight—a beau-ideal painted by her own fruitful fancy—one whom she loved to invest with the endearing ties of consanguinity, became a fever—an absorbing passion of her soul, which she scarcely would have exchanged for a cold reality. Of Moorish blood, she was ardent in the extreme, and yet so delicate were her feelings, that though she lingered again and again over the picture of intensely reciprocated passion that had never for an instant been effaced from her mind, she would not have voluntarily yielded to the handsomest of those knights, had he not fully realized her soul's ideality, and furthermore shared to the uttermost her own wild and thrilling thoughts. Possessed of little or no education as the eastern women were, and have continued to be to this day, and indeed as the first ladies of the West also were at that period, she was, nevertheless, gifted with great but unobtrusive strength of mind, scorning those prejudices which equally influenced the conquerors and the conquered, and had moistened the land with their mutual blood. She dared inwardly to condemn, as unworthy that reason and intelligence which Allah had given to man, the belief that He had created the human race, in its almost god-like form, except with a view to the intense happiness which that very organization proved had been the chief object of their being. Reality could afford no such joy to her as did the ripe paintings of her own glowing imagination. At first she was startled at the vivacity of thoughts which would force themselves upon her in spite of all attempts to banish them, but the more she reflected the more she became convinced of the almost wickedness of endowing the great Creator of all things with other attributes than those of love, kindness, charity, beneficence, approval on the indulgence of that beautiful, that mysterious union of the choicest of his creatures, of which He, in the fulness of his crowning and immortal glory, was at once the fount and essence. Never could she reconcile to herself, because man, in his dogmatic authority, asserted it to be crime, that the infinite, the perfect God, regarded as such, the sweet fruits of the surpassingly-glorious works of his hands. What could be the delight of Allah! Surely it was not in seeing hecatombs of his own creation mangled and perishing in excruciating agony—welling forth the pure love which He had infused into their veins for a far different purpose—it could not be that

he found pleasure or gratification in the business, the vanity, the littleness, the cheating, the lying, the hypocrisy, the heartlessness of those whose souls had been given them for nobler purposes—given to them that they might comprehend and glorify the goodness of Him who had bestowed upon them a part of His own divinity—delegated to them the incomprehensible power to create themselves, and by means of such transporting joy, as in His great wisdom, *He* hallowed with the mystery of his own all-glorious Godhead.

Such were the feelings, the thoughts, the creed of the beautiful Zuleima, when she had attained her seventeenth year; and yet with a soul overflowing with love for the great Allah, from whom it was her delight to believe all her impulsive aspirations came—while painting images of rapture which the glowing of soul alone can understand, she had not yet found him with whom she could partake of the priceless and ecstatic bliss that memory, aided by imagination, had painted on her mind. It was then that Saladin first beheld her, and struck with her surpassing beauty, offered her the high position of an eastern sultan's wife. Motives of prudence on the part of Zuleima, caused her to accept an offer that implied a command. Saladin was no Sardanapalus. Ardent in his temperament, yet little understanding those exquisite refinements which give to enjoyment its principal charm, he had, in the first years of their union, and soon after possession, treated her indifferently with the rest of his wives. Too proud, gentle by nature as she was, to betray the disappointment of her love, she had lingered on in the chilling ties of polygamic marriage—every finer sense obtused, and her heart sick at the absence of her ideal, who alone could understand and respond to the secret fire at her heart. It was at the period, when this feeling was the strongest, that chance threw her into the way of de Boiscourt. The very first glance satisfied her soul. Her beau-ideal was there—identified—found at last—and readily and impulsively, and with her mind filled with the intense thought that all her glowing dreams were at length on the point of realization, she yielded up every suppressed desire of her heart to him, in the fullest luxury of a devoted woman's nature. It has been seen how short-lived was the cause for her self-congratulation.

More radiant than ever in beauty on her return from the Christian camp, Saladin had again remarked her, and wondering how he could have been so insensible to that which had, on the first instance captivated his fancy, lavished all the ardor of his love upon her, with a fervor, a devotedness, which had he been but imaginative as herself, would have left her little to desire. His love was impetuously, exclusively devoted to her, but it wanted that delicacy of mind, that soft and dreamy abandonment of the absorbed soul, which she pined for in the partner of her nuptial couch—the man who should call forth in her the purest seeds of that chastened fire which she looked upon as a sacred gift—a beautiful boon from Allah. To her glowing and impassioned soul, mere physical passion, gross sensuality, had no charms. Apart from the keener emotions which sting, which madden the blood through the imagination, she felt more animal indulgence to be degrading in the extreme. There was no doubt guilt, according to the fiat of society and the church, in even imagining that illicit love, which Adah found so sweet when she commenced the task of peopling the world; but, unlike

Adah's, her incestuous love was born only of, and existed wholly in, her ardent imagination, which, uniting all ties in one, luxuriated in their possession with a boundlessness of pleasure no language can adequately convey. Still she loved her husband—loved him not only for himself, but for the frequent opportunities he gave her to revel in the glowing pictures of her imaginative mind, and most on that recalled by the memory of her adventure with the handsome French Knight.

It was no fault of his that Saladin shared not her secret sympathies, responded not to her dearest impulses. He had never known, never suspected their existence, nor was it for her to impart them, unless sought by one of corresponding character and feeling. Gradually she had been led to believe that she was alone in her ideas of happiness, and that she had been lavishing the warmest affections of her heart upon that which must ever remain a shadow—that no kindred mind would ever be found to throw even the semblance of reality over the rich imagination of her maturer womanhood.

No wonder then that, with a mind so constituted, feelings so voluptuously toned, Zuleima should have felt her soul intoxicated with delight, as the tender but impassioned Rudolph, resembling rather an angel of light, than a being of mortality, first avowed to her sentiments so kindred to those which preyed like a devouring fire upon her blood. The world, although then abandoned to the lowest profligacy and vice, had still its prejudices; but these could offer no restriction to the soaring mind. The very barrier that was outwardly imposed on it, made it the more anxious to overleap. The prohibition of the reality rendered the semblance more intense. Zuleima had thought deeply on the subject, and unlike the millions of women who surrounded her. Were it possible that she could now arise from the dead and witness the long delayed expansion of human intellect, which is fast assuming a strength that must soon uproot all prejudice that estranges the human heart, and shackles the noblest impulses of our nature, she would see that man was rapidly adopting her own cherished theories, for she would behold a nation hitherto considered the most moral of the earth, uniting through their leaders—men of sound judgment and enlarged minds—to divest of the name and odium of criminal love, one of the most delightful feelings of the human heart, that of imparting to the soul of the cherished and favorite sister of one's departed wife, that tide of happiness which had suffused her own. "What fools," she would have been inclined to exclaim. For what dearer in love than that which weds you in the same holy bond, her whom you have known in every phase of intimacy, and who, in bringing back the dear image of her whom you still mourn, fills your rapt soul with a two-fold emotion of delight—confined not to yourself, but to her who succeeds, and drops a tear to her memory in your arms. What, too, would be her triumph, to see the capital of the most intellectual city of the world, returning as their delegate, in the temples of wisdom, the man whose writings have ever been inculcating the creed of her own heart, and of whose lust, it is said, that no bookseller dare to append his name to it—no vender to place it on his counter. But the millennium has not yet arrived. Men desire, but fear the approach of perfect happiness. Women understand it better.

Thus would Zuleima have spoken, in all the warmth of her imaginative

soul. She would have been startled to hear it confessed to astonished multitudes, that that was not crime, but virtuous passion, which the descendants of the Christian spoliators of her own native land had, for ages, stamped as the former; but against which the great God, who created the world in a beauty, which man himself alone has marred, had never pronounced his fiat. She would have had no difficulty in divining that, of all those prejudices which yet enslave the human heart, none would be much longer suffered by the enlightened mind to disgrace the goodness of the Creator, but that immutable, and stern, and just one, which demands the blood of him who has taken from his fellow, the first and most precious of His gifts. That He has willed His severest judgment against the wanton destroyer of the breathing work of immortal hands, she had ever religiously believed. That, with blasphemy and foul slander, were the only crimes she admitted against God; all the others were of human invention.

No wonder, then, that the love Zuleima bore the boy, who dared to think as he did—who thought like herself—fearlessly, yet secretly and voluptuously, was the sweetest she had ever known. She had at length met him for whom her heart had so long pined in vain. Her second self had been found, not exactly the beau-ideal of her younger years, but one whom her own increased fullness of womanhood caused her now to prize the more. It suited her voluptuous fancy better that the sweet fever of her-love should be understood and shared by the daring and beautiful boy, than by the sterner and more ripened man. Moreover, her feelings of preference partook of a double character. To the strong and extraordinary feeling he had infused into her, after the interchange of their mutual explanation, she united all the tenderness and affection of a mother! There was a newness, a freshness, an impulsiveness, and yet a subdued languor in the one, which she could not expect to find in the other. Never was Adonis dearer to Venus; and as that voluptuous goddess found deeper joy in the fresh love of the hunter boy, than in those of the iron-sinewed Vulcan or the vigorous Mars, so did the beautiful and tender Zuleima prefer the freshness of Rudolph to the maturity of Saladin, even while she lavished all her tenderness on both.

CHAPTER XVII

THE captive Monk-Knight sat alone in the handsome tent which Saladin had assigned him on hearing from his lips, at the close of the battle of Tiberias, the service rendered by himself and de Boiscourt. It has been attributed to the Saracen chief that he was full of artifice and treachery. Here was an occasion when he thought himself justified in having recourse to them at the expense even of the honor of his captive, to whom he felt himself to be indebted. The statement made in the presence of the Grand Master, and of the other knights of the two orders, of his having embraced Moslemism to

save his life, was false, and told at his own command. Saladin had heard of the great fame for piety and virtue of the Monk-Knight—remarkable even among the Templars, and strict Knights of St. John, and he was determined, if possible, to turn it to account. It would have been a greater triumph to him to compel these proud and unbending men to become converts to Moslemism, than to have seen them bow their necks to the scimeter. He well knew that death carried no terror with it, for that was always familiar to them; but the shame of apostasy must live for ever as a gangrene at their hearts. He had therefore caused the knights to be summoned together, after having duly instructed his officer, who gave in their presence the answer that has been recorded—an answer which filled the hearts of all with shame and sorrow, that one so noble—so universally looked up to—should have proved thus recreant to his vows. Saladin had been betrayed into impulsive anger by the insulting tone in which the Grand Master had alluded to his religion, and therefore, in the mood of exasperation evinced by the knights generally, he deemed it more prudent—more likely to effect the object he had in view—to give them until morning to cool their blood, and to ponder well over the course they believed the Monk had pursued.

Meanwhile, unconscious of the injury that was being done to his reputation in the hearing of his honorable comrades, Abdallah sat alone in the unguarded tent which his priestly character had caused Saladin to allot to him in that portion of the encampment which contained his seraglio. His mood was thoughtful, and yet on his noble brow there lingered that calm benevolence—that holy placidity which, almost always, was observable there, even in the thickest of the battle—for, unlike the other knights, he wore no visor attached to his helmet, when his herculean arm cut down whole sections of Saracens as easily as the mower cuts down the grass of the field. But though his brow was unruffled, there were wild thoughts stirring at his heart. Deep sorrow, too, was there; for he mourned the beloved, the generous friend of his bosom. And when he reflected that he should never again behold, radiant with life and intelligence, that handsome face which he had so long loved to dwell upon, a tear—the first and only one he ever shed—stole down his cheek, a heartfelt tribute to the memory of the gay, and brave, and high-souled young knight.

Gradually his thoughts assumed another turn. He reverted to the Lady Ernestina, and as he pictured her glowing and widowed beauty given up to his possession, even as he had seen that of the wife of Saladin given to her noble, yet ill-fated husband, his desire for her became so impetuous, that he ground his teeth in anguish at the recollection of the possibility of his never being permitted to behold her; for he, like his companions, was aware that every knight who refused to adopt the koran as his creed, was doomed to perish. Should his life be spared, all restraint upon his passion would be removed. His friend dead—his order almost annihilated—the Christian cause apparently abandoned by God himself—he had promptly decided upon his course. Never would he embrace Moslemism—never would he be compelled to abjure Christianity; but, if necessary, he would forsake that cowl to which experience proved he had hitherto devoted himself in vain. Paradise—the paradise of the Lady Ernestina's arms—would richly repay him

for the secession. In future she should be his hope, his temple, and his shrine of holy love. Twenty years at least of bliss should be his on her luxurious bosom. Twenty years, at least, the rich galaxy of her charms should be bestowed on him. Twenty years at least should they both realize that strange and intoxicating bliss which he rather imagined than understood.

A great change had come over the mind of Abdallah since he had beheld the rich beauty of Zuleima ; first, when bound to the aycamore tree, her long and floating hair but half-concealing her forced nakedness ; next, when extended on the velvet moss, she lay exposed to the gloating eyes of Thibaud. And that bosom his eye had not dared to gaze upon, his hand had chanced to touch, after placing her on the saddle before de Boiscourt. These were the first germs of knowledge of the sex of woman the Monk-Knight had ever known ; and when, towards the dawn of that night, he beheld de Boiscourt already folded in her arms, and uttering murmurs of joy, to which she wildly responded with her sighs, the veil was wholly removed, and now, for the first time, he comprehended that pining after something—he knew not what—which had oft visited him in his monkish cell. From that hour, deep were the struggles of his soul with guilt ; night after night had he knelt in prayer to heaven to strengthen him in his purity. But it was in vain that he attempted to banish the recollection of what he had seen and known. It would surprise him in his orisons—it would haunt him in his sleep—it would be the last thing he thought of on retiring to his rude couch—which she first thought on waking. And yet, the passion engendered by these images, might have been mastered in time—absence from objects calculated to inflame might have redeemed the error—for such in a man consistent with himself it was—and restored him to his original purity of mind. But alas ! de Boiscourt did more by his description of his beautiful wife to undo the stern virtue of the Monk-Knight, than did that which he had even seen and felt. That temptation he resisted as long as he could, but such frequent recurrence to the subject was adding fuel to the fire, until in the end his passion for her became so intense, that, as has been seen, he promised to make the greatest sacrifice on earth—that of his Church—to make her his own for ever.

Such were the feelings of Abdallah—such his resolution, as now he pondered deeply on the future. His monastic vows had no longer a charm for him—that charm, which in the pious, is derived from the consciousness of the performance of a strict duty, and yet it suddenly occurred to him that his possession of the beautiful Lady Ernestina need not involve the violation of his connexion with the Church, which would rather give a character of holiness to his passion. He would, in that case, be at once her husband and her confessor, and the Monk should make atonement for the sin of the man. The very idea excited him, and though his countenance, ever serene, betrayed not the workings of his mind, he luxuriated in the thought of first possessing her, as himself, in his priestly character, until his impatience of delay became so great, that he was compelled to pace his tent, in the hope of distracting his attention from the subject. But the effort was vain. There, in the crouching attitude of a Venus, stood the beautiful woman, so palpably

delineated to his mind's-eye, that it seemed gifted with warmth and motion—an enchanting vision—with long floating hair that appeared to smile through her half-closed lips of pure and moistened red, and woo him with soft and melting eyes to her outstretched arms. Whichever way he turned—however much he endeavored to dispel the illusion by forced recurrence to less exciting subjects, that image was still there, rich in the utmost perfection of woman's loveliness. The fire of his heart became now insupportable. He could have died in the next hour to possess her then, for still the glorious and beauteous image haunted him. Cold drops of perspiration fell from his brow, and he almost gasped for breath. Then thinking that the darkness might afford him relief, he partially removed his armor and the outward portion of his dress, and then extinguished his lamp.

Looking out at his tent-door, he saw from the appearance of the heavens, that it was near morning. The whole camp of Saladin was evidently wrapped in sleep, for scarce a sound was heard but that of the moving sentinels. He closed the aperture and again paced the interior. Soon he saw a light at one end, admitted evidently through a second imperfectly-closed opening in the thin canvass. He approached it, and looking through beheld what had not hitherto attracted his attention—another tent of slighter material; the entrance to which was folded back as if to admit the air, and showing the rich decorations of the interior. While he gazed, surprised to see so gorgeous a tent in the heart of so rude an encampment of armed warriors, he looked through the muslin and distinctly beheld, in outline, the shadow of a female form so richly moulded, that, excited as he was by the feelings that had been for hours preying upon his soul, he could not resist the strong temptation that impelled him to see more of her. He threw open the newly-discovered entrance to his own tent and passed out; then, pausing for a moment, he glanced around endeavoring to penetrate the darkness that everywhere prevailed. Finding that all was still, he looked again upon the figure, strongly relieved by that time, by a light that stood near. She was evidently undressing, and the shadow of each garment could be traced as it fell from the form of the wearer. Presently a mass of slowly unrolling hair fell over the tunic which alone remained. More than all else, the sight of that redundant hair inflamed the blood of the Monk-Knight. It reminded him of her who, even in the presence of another, stood before him. The priest was gone, the man alone stood confessed. He trembled in every limb; his muscles became hard and swollen; his robust frame expanded. He must have been more than human to have suppressed the tumult of his over-boiling passion. Still he hesitated. He thought of the danger; not that death in the abstract had any fear for him, but that it must for ever rob him of Ernestina, the goddess of his adoration. At that moment the figure left the shade and approached a small table, as if to place the lamp there before extinguishing it. The Monk now beheld, in the full glare of light, her magnificent bosom uncovered, and slightly pendant, as she stooped over the table; one white and moulded arm gracefully put forward with the lamp, the other thrown across her waist to supply the absence of a girdle, while the full volume of her jet black hair, extending to the knee, almost embraced

with its luxuriant fulness, the snow-white tunic that was only partially visible.

Abdallah could endure this no longer. Like a man rushing madly upon destruction, he crossed the slight space that separated him from her. Arrived at the threshold, again he paused. The female turned her face towards him, and started at the sight of a man so near her. The first glance he obtained of her face, assured the Monk-Knight of the presence of his former Saracen captive. Maddened by the contemplation of her beauty, thus again brought strikingly before him, his own noble countenance shone with an expression that was indescribable, but which brought the warm blood into Zuleima's cheek, as, recognizing the Monk, she raised her hands in mute astonishment and joy. Abdallah put his finger significantly to his lips. The only reply of Zuleima was a smile, such as the Houris only bestow upon angels. The Monk-Knight was electrified. He passed the threshold—he threw a hurried glance around to see if she was alone, and that glance sufficed to show him the position of all conspicuous objects in the tent. She hurriedly extinguished the lamp, when all became dark as midnight. Dreading her flight, and yet reassured by that enchanting smile, one bound brought Abdallah to the spot where she still stood, trembling also with agitation and excitement. With a groan that came from the depths of his now wild and impassioned soul, he caught her in his arms from the carpet, and enfolded her to his heaving chest.

What language shall pretend to paint the ecstatic feelings of him who, in the full vigor of his unbroken manhood, first presses to his maddened heart that angel, clothed in luxuriant and surpassing beauty, who has been given to him to be the pure and holy temple of his love. For some moments Abdallah could not speak. His large frame trembled: his hand caressed; he drank in her murmured sighs; her arms were around his neck; her fragrant kisses bedewed his lips; her unbound hair floated over his shoulders.

"Father, holy father," murmured Zuleima, in Moorish, "do you, then, at last, love her whom you saved from worse than death? shall she yet have a place in your heart?"

"Love!" said the Monk, fiercely; "profane not the term. What I feel for you is ungovernable passion provoked by an image that is even now floating before me in all the radiance of her surpassing beauty."

Zuleima did not reply, but pressing her arm more fondly around his neck, faintly sighed.

"Nay, sigh not," whispered the Monk, in a milder tone. "It is not that you are not lovely also, but that she is herself alone—unapproachable. My soul is hers."

The day was beginning to dawn. The Monk-Knight imprinted a last proof of his strong desire upon the heaving bosom of Zuleima, who, in her turn pressed him to her throbbing heart.

As he rose, she followed. She knelt at his feet—she embraced his knees—then rising and taking a ring from her finger, and placing it on the little finger of the hand she had taken, she murmured,

"One last blessing, holy father, I ask of you. Accept and wear this ring for my sake. It is that which I prize the most, and therefore I give it to

you. It was my father's, entrusted to me in pledge to restore it should I ever meet his first-born son, long absent from his family; but as time and circumstances show that this may never be, I present it to you. When in the arms of the Lady Ernestina—oh! happy, happy Christian woman!—you chance to look on this, bestow, I pray, one passing thought on me."

Zuleima wept, and her sobs were audible. Ashamed of the fiery passion which had made him unfaithful to the woman he adored, the Monk-Knight, still tenderly feeling for the evident sorrow of the Saracen at parting with him, pressed her once more to his heart, and imprinting a kiss upon her beautiful and burning cheek, withdrew with cautious step, as he had entered, in the dark.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SCARCELY had the Monk-Knight time to resume his armor, when an officer appeared to summon him before Saladin, in whose presence the great body of the Christian knights were assembled to receive their doom. A murmur of disapprobation arose among his companions as he entered. All turned their looks haughtily and gloomily upon him, and one stalwart Templar, more insolent than the rest, struck him a blow with his ungloved hand—an act that was followed by a smile of derision from the rest. But the mortified and indignant Monk, ignorant of the cause of this gross outrage, repaid the blow with fearfully retributive justice. Rapid as thought his own heavy hand struck the Templar on the brow, and in the next instant he was a corpse at his feet. The other knights would have interfered to avenge his death, but Saladin, furious with rage, commanded the guard to stay this unseemly conduct of the Christian knights, and to slay whomsoever should dare to lay a hand upon the Monk.

"Well may the apostate from God find favor in the eyes of his Moslem seducer," scornfully remarked the head of his own order. "But yesterday and I would have defied all Christendom to produce a warrior of more untainted virtue—of more unsullied fame."

"Yea, strange things have been since yesterday," replied the Monk, with gravity, a faint and transient glow passing over his noble and intellectual brow. "But what means this? Wherefore am I summoned here? Who knows of my fall from virtue?"

"You admit it then; it is no slander on the holiness of your past life!" returned the Grand Master, lifting up his clasped hands, in wonderment, to heaven.

"I do—I admit it," vehemently returned the Monk-Knight; "and my soul glories in the divine knowledge. Up to this hour I have lived in vain. Let fools live on regarding well those vows that wed them to monastic life. I'd peril all of hope a thousand times to taste again the joy the wondrous change has wrought in me. But who has so well informed you, old companions of many a toilsome hour?"



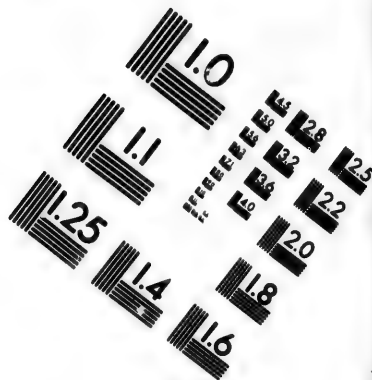
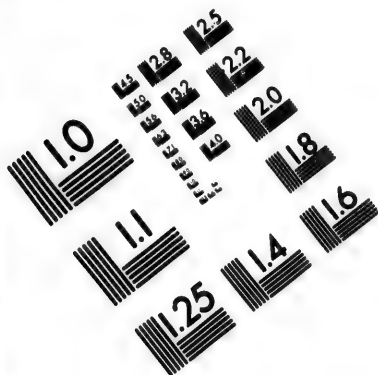
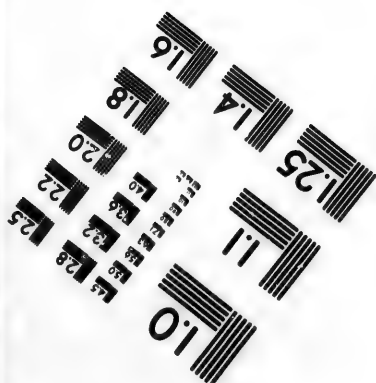
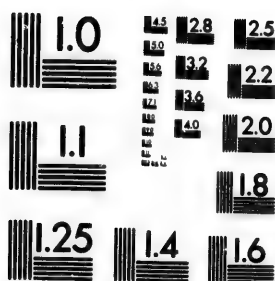


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"Who should, but Saladin himself," returned the Grand Master. "Who else were conscious of the guilty fact. His eye was on you from the very first. He marked the covert weakness of your soul, and now he triumphs in your fall."

The Monk-Knight replied not. He was confounded. Saladin knew all, and yet he lived. What could this seeming clemency mean? or what horrible fate was reserved for him, and, more cruel still, for Zuleima? He marked the kindling eye of the Saracen chief fixed on him, and for the first time in his life, it cost him an effort to prevent his own from quailing beneath his fiery glance.

"Christian Knights, no more," haughtily exclaimed the Sultan, who clearly seeing, though he could not understand the purport, that the Monk had misinterpreted the meaning of his comrades, was not desirous that further converse should enlighten them. "Stand forth and answer, have you thought well of our proposal, and do ye too accept the terms?"

"In the name of the One God, and of Christ the Saviour, no!" solemnly pronounced the Grand Master of St. John's, stepping forward and bending one knee, while he raised his hands and eyes to heaven.

"In the name of the One God, and of Christ the Saviour, no!" repeated the Knights of the Temple and of St. John, kneeling also.

"In the name of the One God," commenced the Monk-Knight, to the infinite astonishment of his brethren in captivity.

"Stay, holy warrior!" exclaimed Saladin. "That vow is vain in thee, and can but offer slight unto the Moslem Mosque—unto the religion of the true believer. Christian Knights, let me do justice to him to whom I have temporarily rendered wrong for right—evil for good. Know that it was at my command the rumor ran throughout your ranks, that this holy and most valiant Monk had abjured his Christian vows, and espoused the koran, and for this reason it was, that I wished to place the strong example of so good a man before you. I had hoped the report of his apostacy would have influenced yourselves. But I judged you wrong. You have mocked my deep deceit. Knights of both Orders, and of the Temple in particular, cordially I detest you; but though the man may dislike, the warrior admires: therefore one more chance I give. If there be any among your cruel and remorseless ranks who have rendered service—evinced the commonest humanity of our nature to a Saracen—let them stand forth, give such proof of the act as may convince, and not only shall they not be called upon to renounce their creed, but they shall go scatheless from my just vengeance."

The whole of the knights were silent, yet looked more haughtily than before. There was only one amid that assemblage of Christians who had ever stayed his hand of blood, or who could adduce the slightest proof of service or pity to their foes.

"Ha! by the Prophet, is it so then?" exclaimed Saladin, his eye flashing fire, and his hand dropping to his scimeter. "Is all that I have heard reported so true? Not mercy even to woman or child, and yet you call yourselves disciples of One whose chief attributes you promulgate as those of forbearance and mercy! Then, throwing his keen glance upon Abdallah, who stood with his arms folded, and a prey to deep emotion, which, however,

his placid brow denied—"And you, Sir Monk," have you no proof to offer, wherefore a kindred death should not be yours? Methinks that noble mien might summon from our camp, those who would gladly bear witness to your forbearance, if such you have extended."

The Knight-Monk slightly bowed his head, but continued silent.

"What!" continued Saladin angrily; "dost mean, most proud and stubborn Monk, to mock our kindness? Speak; what service have you done of mercy, that it may redeem your forfeit life?"

"If I am silent," said Abdallah, calmly, "it is because I can adduce no proof: my simple saying would avail not. But yesterday, I claimed for the slain companion of my warrior toils, the rites of Christian sepulchre, for having saved the wife of Saladin from outrage. Was this granted? Was I believed, proud Sultan? What, then, the greater hope, that if my word was heeded not yesterday in the battle-field, it will now find credit in the man who is a seeming candidate for life before you?"

"It will—it shall," observed Saladin, in answer to the latter part of his observation. "There is that about you, noble Monk, which tells your lips you never lie. Speak, then, the service you have rendered."

"Great Saladin! I am your debtor for the high esteem in which you hold me," replied Abdallah, in the same calm tone, while his usually placid brow was tinged with a shade of melancholy. Had this been but yesterday, I should have better prized the boon you offer: to-day I heed it not; I am prepared to die with these, my gallant comrades, with whom—all praise to God—I stand acquitted of the foul charge they wronged me greatly in believing."

"Noble Abdallah, forgive me—forgive us all," continued the Grand-Master of St. John; "forgive me for the thought that one, so late the proud example of us all, should have sold his honor for his life."

"I do forgive you—I forgive you all. Forgiveness we shall soon require in heaven. The greatest boon the noble Saladin can yield, is that already given—the repairing of his deep injustice—I ask no more."

"No words can repeat our sorrow," said one of the group of knights who now surrounded and pressed his ungloved palms in theirs; "we have done you wrong—but heart and soul, while on the point of passing into eternity, we abjure that wrong."

"Amen!" solemnly rejoined the Grand Master.

"Ha!" said the Monk, struggling to subdue his emotion. "This, indeed, repays me with usury for wrong."

In the meantime, Saladin having given some directions to a principal officer, he left the spacious tent, and after the lapse of a few minutes, re-appeared, conducting in a woman clad in long white garments, so loosely made as to conceal all the symmetry of her person. A hood thrown over her head, hid every particle of her hair, and otherwise set recognition at defiance.

"Woman!" said the Sultan to her, roughly, "what would you have?"

"I would save the life of one who saved mine," was answered in a trembling voice that sent the blood thrilling through every vein of the outwardly-unmoved Monk. "I understand that your Highness had promised

mercy to him who had extended, mercy to a Saracen—I came to see if the preserver of my honor was here, and if so, to save him.”

“Such is our design,” replied the Sultan; “look round, woman, and see if, among these knights, you can recognize him of whom you speak.”

The female turned slowly round, and after leisurely passing her glance over the group of knights, suffered her eyes to rest upon Abdallah, who stood at that edge of the semicircle which adjoined the opening.

“Who could mistake that majestic form, that noble mien—that divine face and brow,” exclaimed the woman, almost passionately, yet in a trembling voice, as she pointed towards him. “That, your Highness, is my deliverer. He, it was, who, when a band of Christian ruffians had torn me from my humble home, and were about to do me violence in a spot remote from aid, suddenly, with his single arm, and when hope seemed lost, smote off the head of six fierce ruffians, in less time, your Highness, than I take to tell you of the deed.”

“Well can I believe it, woman. The scimeter that clove but yesterday, clear from the neck to the groin, and through the saddle of the strong armed son of Baghorian, and in the next minute divided the body of Al Aphdal, causing one half to roll upon the ground, and the other to be carried off by his frightened steed, seated in his saddle as he had mounted him, would make but child’s play the cutting of half-a-dozen throats.”

All the knights listened with surprise and admiration, for, although they had often witnessed the prowess of Abdallah’s arm, they had never known of a feat like this.

“And was this done, great Saladin?” ventured the Grand Master.

“I saw it with my own eyes, and felt myself outdone,” returned the Sultan, “for never had I thought that human strength could achieve it. Sir Monk, if you have studied holiness, as you have the scimeter, none can be found in Christendom more saintly than yourself. But how is this? The woman states it was you who rendered service to her—a service which you see has impressed her with deep gratitude, put forth in language that attests it, while you attribute it to the Order and exertions of your friend who fell in battle yesterday! Which, then, are we to believe!—the gratitude which never lightly speaks, or the generosity of soul which would invest the memory of your friend with honor, regardless wholly of yourself. Which, then, I say, are we to believe?”

“I know not the woman,” replied Abdallah, almost hoarsely, as he cast a look of severe displeasure on her; “I never did her service.”

“Believe it not, your Highness. His noble heart disdains the gallant deed, that he may obtain attention to his friend, to whom he wrongly imputes the act. Well do I know him. It was only after the men he slew, lay bleeding on the earth, his brother knight appeared. He, too, had acted nobly, if he could, but time was not allowed him.”

“It is wrong, great Saladin”—this woman raves—“they mistake me for some other,” returned the Monk-Knight. “I have no claim, whatever, on your favor and prefer none.”

“Nay, by the holy Mahomet! I swear that it was he alone who delivered me from the peril,” energetically continued the woman. “He wore no visor

to his helmet, but his features were exposed even as now, and who, as I have just said, could fail to know them ever after? I'll swear upon the koran, it was he."

"Enough," said the Sultan. "He is saved. By to-morrow's dawn, Sir Monk, we move from hence to the walls of Jerusalem, which a holy inspiration tells me, shall be again our own. As far as the Christian gates we will conduct you. Let this goblet be the pledge."

A page handed him a goblet of sherbet, of which he drank, and then caused it to be taken to Abdallah, who reluctantly partook of it.

In obedience to a signal of the Sultan, the female turned to withdraw, after humbly making her obeisance. As she passed close to the Monk, she sighed; and although her eyes were not visible through the thick veil she wore, it was evident her attention was directed to him. Abdallah's emotion was unusually great, and when she had come opposite to him, he said in a low tone, while his eyes were turned another way:

"Guilty wife of Saladin—beautiful enchantress, avant!

For a moment she stood transfixed to the spot, but suddenly recovering herself, clasped her hands across her heart, bowed her head over her bosom, and passed slowly out of the tent.

"And now, all that remains, is to decide upon your fate," said Saladin. "Men of hardened hearts, whose trade is blood, your doom is sealed. Oft have I sworn that when emmeshed within my toils, your heads should answer the grave offences laid to you, and yet, more merciful than yourselves, I give assurance of freedom, if but one single act of forbearance can be recorded in your favor."

"Proud Saladin, we defy your power!" returned the Grand Master, firmly. Act your vengeance as you may, you cannot wring a pang from Christian knights and Christian warriors. It were more to your glory, and nobler far, methinks, to spare these taunts, and straight pronounce the order for our doom. We'll teach your Moslems how a Christian dies."

"Then shall the lesson soon be taught," returned the Saracen chief. "What, ho! Let all the force to arms be instant summoned, and a space beyond the camp selected where all may see the act of justice done."

The chief officer retired, and soon the sound of many trumpets rent the air; and the tread of armed men met the ear, in the short intervals of their clang.

"Sir Monk," said Saladin, rising from his throne, "retire to your tent, I would not have you to behold that which must give pain to your noble heart. Retire, you have looked your last upon these cruel men."

"Then, since the boon of death be denied me,"—he paused, for again the image of the Lady Ernestina rose before him, in all her glorious beauty, and seemed to reproach him for his willingness to die—"since you have granted me life," he continued, "let me ask another grace—permission to take a last farewell of these my tried comrades in arms."

"Be it so," replied Saladin; "but be brief."

First he affectionately embraced the Grand Master, who again expressed his deep sorrow that he should have done him the injustice to believe that he had forsaken the religion of Christ for that of Mahomet, and then addressing

the rest of his companions, of whom, from their numbers, he could not take leave in a similar manner, he pointed out the glory of their martyrdom, not only in this world, but in the next, and finished by saying, that he would make known in the Christian camp the noble manner in which they had met their fate.

A flourish of atabals and trumpets was heard without. An officer with a strong guard entered, leaving others lining the approach. Saladin gave the signal, and preceded by the Grand Master, who walked with proud step and undaunted mien, two hundred and fifty Knights Templar, and nearly the same number of the Knights of St. John, looking more haughty even than their chief, moved forth to the intended scene of their execution.

"God have mercy on their souls," fervently aspirated the Monk-Knight, when the last had passed the tent. "I would not willingly behold their death, even if the safety of the Holy City depended on my compliance. The sight would for ever unnerve and make me a terror to myself."

And heavier in spirit than he had been since his entrance into Palestine, he moved shudderingly to his tent, where he threw himself, almost in despair, upon his couch, and listening, despite of himself, to hear the sounds of massacre of his friends. But there was no evidence to mark the precise moment when these brave knights fell victims to this black and ineffaceable stain upon the character of their conqueror. The scimeter silently performed its horrid task of blood. Abdallah heard it not.

CHAPTER XIX.

DEEP anguish was in the soul of the Monk-Knight, as he half reclined upon his luxurious couch, for guilt—stern consciousness of guilt—was upon his troubled spirit. The calm of his nature had almost deserted him. For the first time his noble brow was overcast, and his cheek flushed with shame. What events had the last twenty-four hours produced? His friend slain—a battle decisive of the fate of the Holy City fought and lost—nearly the whole of the two knightly Orders destroyed—and himself, not only lost to virtue, but with the crime of inconstancy to Ernestina already on his soul. This was indeed enough to weigh down and oppress his heart, and to unfit him for communion even with himself. It was in vain that he recalled all the irresistible fascinations of the bewitching Saracen, and recalled also his peculiar and almost frenzied state of mind at the moment when her beauty, unveiled in all its glory, first burst upon his maddened senses. For a moment this specious sophistry almost soothed his remorseful soul into silence; but his was too high and brave a nature to long accept contentedly such faltering compromises with conscience, such pitiful excuses for crime. No, greatly as he had sinned, yet he derived a kind of sullen satisfaction from confessing to himself the full enormity of his offence, and even exaggerating its guilty details. In this contradictory and almost savage frame of mind he received the command of Saladin to repair instantly to his tent. Heart-sick and hopeless of future peace, and feeling that

the Lady Ernestina was lost to him forever—that he had committed crime, not only towards her, but towards God, which nothing could atone for—he hailed with satisfaction an order, which he fully expected was to lead to death. But the resentment he had felt at the manner of his comrades, who had charged him with apostacy, and even believed him guilty of that crime, was so great, that it created a re-action in his mind; and when he found that Saladin was not only sincere in his offer of life, but determined he should accept it, he resolved to avail himself of a gift which would afford him time to expiate his great sin in penitence and self-sacrifice. Then came another re-action. In the woman who entered to give testimony as to the service he had rendered to her, he had recognized Zuleima. A feeling of bitterness came over his soul, for he could not but attribute to her, not only the crime he had committed, but his infidelity to the Lady Ernestina, and in proportion as she became warm in her acknowledgment, so did he feel his heart estranged from her as the destroyer of his happiness. Hence his rude denial of all that she had advanced to save his life. In short, the heart of Abdallah was a prey to every sort of contradictory feeling, each based upon his own weakness. The excitement of the scene he had passed through, had, to a certain extent, sustained him while in the tent of Saladin, but now that he was in his own, and alone in that vast camp, his spirits were depressed even unto sadness.

That Zuleima really loved him he could not doubt. From the few words she had addressed to him on giving the ring, he had gathered the leading points of the beautiful and enamored woman's history. From what he had heard he believed that she had been carried off into the interior, unless, indeed, Saladin had espoused her in her own native land, and during his earlier adventurous course of war. He was most anxious to obtain further information from her of her previous history, but how to accomplish this he did not know. In two days, at the furthest, he would have left the camp of Saladin for ever, therefore it was not likely that he should again have an opportunity of seeing her who had shared his guilty love. But as he reflected, he became more composed in mind, for he argued pleasantly to himself, that though a fearful crime had been theirs in fact, it was not so in intention, since neither could resist the spell that bound them. The poisoned arrow of remorse was, therefore, in a great measure, robbed of the keenness of its venom, while, unknown to all the world besides, the recollection of the strange circumstances under which they had first met, and last parted, would in distance serve to unite them in the tenderest bonds of fraternal and sisterly love. Consoled by this reflection, the thoughts of Abdallah wandered less restrictively to the Lady Ernestina, to whom he meant to avow his guilt, and in her arms crave forgiveness for the indulgence of an infidelity his very love for herself had caused. Abdallah had, since his fall, become a special pleader in his own cause, and divided as he was between remorse for what he had done, and that which perdition itself would not now prevent him from doing, he sought to impart that ease to his ruffled conscience, without which his future conduct must be, to a certain extent, embittered. Such was the peculiarity of his feeling, that he would have deemed it an insult to the Lady Ernestina—an outrage offered to her confidence, and a dishonor to his own

high sense of integrity and truth, were he not frankly to avow his fault, and plead in extenuation, the strong temptation which he had been more than human to have withstood.

The day was long and dreary, and with these alternate hopes and fears, and lamentations for the past, and glowing visions of the future, the bewildered Monk-Knight passed the intervening time till eve. Great was his delight and surprise when, towards evening, Rudolph, whom he had not seen since their capture, appeared at the entrance of his tent. He bore under his rich cloak a small basket of the richest fruits of Palestine, a golden goblet elaborately carved, and a couple of bottles of sherbet, which he placed upon the table.

"What means this, boy?" asked the Monk-Knight, blandly, after having tenderly embraced him. "Already do I inhabit a princely tent, and princely has been the food allotted to me. Is it to mock me, that Saladin sends these superfluities, so ill-conditioned to my captive state?"

"Not Saladin, but Saladin's best beloved wife, has sent these poor proofs of her unfading gratitude to him whom, even as a brother, with all a sister's fondness, she treasures in her heart. These were the very words she bade me use, Sir Monk."

"Not Saladin, but Saladin's wife!" repeated the Monk. "What means that Moslem dress?"

"It means," said the blushing boy, "that I am page to the Lady Zuleima, that was once a prisoner in my dear lord's tent. Last night she queried as to your health and whereabouts. I could not tell her where, Sir Knight; whereat she was very sad, but she discovered all from Fatima, her faithful slave. This fruit and wine, she, fearful that those whose office it is to serve, may not have borne, prays you to accept, in dear remembrance of the past."

"In dear remembrance of the past," again repeated the Monk-Knight, while the usual placidity of his brow was deeply disturbed.

"Such were her words, Sir Monk," replied the page. "No doubt her meaning bore upon that time, when rescued by your arm, she poured forth her soul in generous thankfulness in my dear—dear lord's tent," and the tears started to his eyes.

Abdallah looked at him silently for a few moments; at length he asked tenderly, "Any tidings of your noble master, Rudolph?"

"Alas, none!" and his pent-up grief broke forth in a paroxysm of tears.

"Nay, nay, dear Rudolph," said the Monk-Knight soothingly, "regret is vain. It is the fate we all expected. It had been nearly yours. Your lord died the death of the glorious—on the battle-field. Let that recollection console you. But tell me," and he looked at the youth as if dreading his answer, "has the scimeter performed its task of blood? Are *they* all destroyed—not one escaped?"

"All are destroyed, Sir Monk; the cruel order of Saladin was but too faithfully obeyed. Not an hour elapsed between their doom and execution. Not one escaped!"

"God have mercy on their souls!" exclaimed the Monk-Knight fervently, and arose from the couch and hurriedly paced his tent. "Too cruel

Saladin—I had hoped that some little mercy would have entered into your heart at last, and that it was chiefly to put their courage to the test that you had caused the scimeter to be uplifted over the devoted heads of those brave and noble knights. Ah! fearfully have you marred the splendor of your victory. A life of brilliant deeds cannot remove the stain which you have cast upon your own escutcheon. Am I myself ungrateful?" he mused to himself, after a short pause; "no, wicked and proud Sultan, I owe you nothing—I saved her to your arms for whom the love of your heart was greatest, and the granting of life to me was but the payment of a righteous debt—mercy for meroy. Ought I to feel regret or remorse then for the occurrence of last night? No; it was a sweet revenge, an anticipated punishment for the cruel slaughter of the chosen—the most faithful servants of God. For the adultery with your wife I mourn not—I rather rejoice in it. It is my infidelity only that harrows up my soul. Yes—sinful, most sinful, to admire the charms of an unblessed heretic and unbeliever; to be filled with an impure desire for the possession of her beauty; and far more criminal still, to have known it with all the wildness of reciprocated passion: and yet again, can that be crime which is committed while the senses are under the control of a delirium. Evil exists only in intention. That which we do not consider to be guilt is not guilt. In like manner, although I have held this Pagan in my arms, it was merely in madness—in an uncontrollable frenzy that led my very soul astray. Therefore am I free of the crime—therefore cannot my conscience reproach me. Therefore have we enjoyed all the sweets of the crime without the bitter penalty which remorse of conscience imposes. True, the sin of wilful adultery we cannot deny; but this I do not repent of, except as connected with the greater crime, inasmuch as in yielding to it, I yielded to an impulse not to be overcome by any power of the will, and because it was a just but imperfect punishment for the cruelty of Saladin." Thus, as it has been before remarked, had Abdallah, enlightened by the emancipation from his vows of chastity, become his own special pleader, not only acquitting himself of the greater crime, but palliating the lesser.

The boy, seeing him absorbed in thought, would not venture to interrupt his reverie, but waited patiently until he should address him.

The Monk-Knight at length discontinued his walk, and seated himself on the couch at his side. He looked benevolently at him for some minutes, and then taking his hand, said:

"Rudolph! our gallant band destroyed, henceforward I have nought to keep me here in Palestine; and you, without your noble lord, must pine, to see once more the verdant fields of rich Auvergne. My life, you know, is spared, and instantly shall I quit a cause which now is hopeless. I go to render to the Lady Ernestina that holy consolation for her husband's fate which it was his great desire I should. Rudolph, dear boy, your noble master charged me that you should be our mutual care, and, ere to-morrow's sun shall set, I'll crave your freedom at the hands of Saladin."

"Ah! Sir Monk, ask me not," exclaimed the boy, with deep emotion, falling on his knees. I cannot—will not quit my mistress' service. I pray you promise, holy Monk, that you will not require this boon of Saladin: never can I return to France."

"What means this, Rudolph?" asked the Monk, with some surprise, and yet benignantly; "not return to France—not return to the wife of your kind lord—him whom you loved so well. I see it, boy," he added after a pause, and looking affectionately in his face; "you love the wife of Saladin."

"I do—I do," said the page vehemently, the color mounting to his cheek, and overspreading his brow; "I love her beyond all expression—all thought—I cannot leave her: she is my heaven—the divinity of my worship."

A pang passed over the heart of Abdallah: it was but for a moment; a nobler impulse succeeded. He caught the boy to his heart. He loved him far better than before—he loved him because he loved Zuleima.

"And does she love you in return?" he asked in a voice that trembled from the emotion of his heart—"tell me, Rudolph, frankly; it concerns your future peace that I should know."

"Oh!" replied the boy, coloring, "I may not tell of that, even if it were so; besides, you know, Sir Monk, it is not because I love her, that it should be supposed the Lady Zuleima loves me—I wish she would;" and he looked stealthily into the Monk's eyes to see if he believed him.

Abdallah slowly and significantly shook his head. "We will talk no more of this," he gravely answered: "but set your mind at ease; I would not, Rudolph, mar your dream of happiness, and therefore, will I not ask Saladin to give you freedom to depart. Yet, ponder well the matter, and then decide."

"Nothing on earth can change my resolution," returned the boy, eagerly. "The answer I now render, I shall always give."

"Oh! de Boiscourt—dear de Boiscourt, friend of my soul, how deeply do I feel your loss!" said the Monk-Knight with an air of abstraction, his thoughts recurring to the melancholy fate of his friend. "Were it not for the dear legacy you have left me, how blank, despairing would be the future? Then would I not have spurned my vows, but henceforth hid me in the cloister's gloom. I had not thought Saladin so cruel as to deny the Christian rites of burial to him who had lent his willing aid to save my —" he checked the word that was even then upon his lips.

"Nay, Sir Monk," replied the boy to his soliloquy, "you do the Monarch wrong. Search was made for his body, but it was nowhere to be found. The report was made to Saladin late last eve, and he directed me to accompany a party by torch-light to identify the knight. At midnight we set out, and not until the day had dawned did we return from our long and fruitless seeking."

"Then you know nothing of him?"

"Nothing, Sir Monk-Knight. Jackalls had evidently been prowling around, for the dead carcass of a horse, stripped of his trappings of war, told of their orgies; but the bodies of the combatants had been removed. Few had fallen there, and those chiefly Saracens. Whether in the darkness of the night my poor lord had been mistaken for an infidel, and carried off as such, I cannot tell—but alas, he was gone for ever!"—and again Rudolph burst into tears.

"Poor, ill-fated de Boiscourt," sighed the Monk, "this must not be told to the beloved one."

"The beloved one," remarked the boy, expressively; "do you mean the Lady Ernestina, Sir Monk?"

"I mean the Lady Ernestina," replied Abdallah, calmly. "Hear me, Rudolph!" and he affectionately pressed his hand—"you have intellect far beyond your years. You have had the wisdom of manhood from earliest boyhood, while I have lived to full maturity, in utter ignorance of my own nature. You are discreet. I may confide in you. I have lost the friend of my heart—the beloved of my affections. You shall supply his place, and the world-taught boy of sixteen—the noble, and the gentle, and the beautiful boy, who has been nursed and cherished in the lap of enlightening love, shall henceforth be the faithful friend of the newly emancipated devotee to the cold cloister. Hear, then, the sweet confession which I make to you, Rudolph. The veil that had so long obscured my just perception of the true value of existence, has been at length removed. The glory of woman I acknowledge. I feel that God never created the beautiful but to be worshipped with the heart's intensest affection. The very mystery of their loveliness proves it. Had I passed my youth in the familiarity of that knowledge, I should not be inspired as I am. Deep reflection assures me that all things are vanity in life, but the earnest, the self-sacrificing, the undying love of woman. Even as you adore Zuleima, so I adore the Lady Ernestina—with frenzy. I spurn the self-denial of the cowl. I go to bask for ever in a beauty that intoxicates and enslaves me—in a word, I go to woo her to prove my surpassing adoration of her beauty."

The boy looked all the strong emotion of his soul. He knelt at the feet of Abdallah. He blessed him for the change that had come over him, and he finally wept tears of joy to think that one so noble, hitherto so insensible to the fascinations of woman, should have yielded himself up a slave to the unseen beauty of her whom he so deeply respected and loved.

"Ah! how happy I am," he murmured. "What new delight you have infused into my being; but pardon the question, dear Sir Monk. Whence arises this strong passion for the widowed wife of my noble lord—you have never seen her?"

"From description alone," returned Abdallah, in a calm tone that belied his feelings. "Rudolph, our future friendship is the seal of confidence and secrecy. What concerns your late lord will, I know, remain locked in your generous bosom for ever. Is it not so, boy?"

"Nothing on this side of the grave will ever tempt me to reveal it," declared the youth fervently.

"Then," said the Monk-Knight, seriously, "learn that the passion which rages in my blood for the Lady Ernestina, has been the effect of the Baron's own words. His delight was to inflame my imagination with glowing descriptions of her unveiled beauty. The glorious picture which he drew of her charming and voluptuous tenderness, first placed woman in a new light before me. It seemed as if a dark cloud had been dissipated—a heavy mist removed from before my eyes. I acknowledged that God had given to his sentient creatures a holiness of desire, which might be prostituted, even.

as the human frame is altered from the divine and perfect form given to Adam and to Eve, and the debased and grovelling mind to a mere passion of the animal, but which in itself is holiness."

"Ah!" said the page, excitedly, throwing himself upon the bosom of the Monk-Knight, "if the Lady Ernestina can but forget her Lord, in a passion as great as your own, profound indeed will be the mutual transport of your souls."

"Doubt it not, gentle Rudolph. The noble-hearted—the generous de Boiscourt left not the work undone. His letters in my praise have so prepared his wife for my deep and glowing love, that her affection, half mine already, will be wholly so, after I shall have borne to her the painful tidings of her dear lord's fate."

Oh, deepest joy!" exclaimed the page. "One great cause, but as you know, Sir Monk, a secondary one, for my staying from my native land, when all is lost, was dread to see the great sorrow of the Lady Ernestina, for him her heart adored. But now that the channel of her desire is partly diverted from its course, without impugment to the first love on which she lived, I glory in the thought that she will be the bride of him whom best her absent lord esteemed."

"Yet, understand me, dear boy. Never would the soul of the matchless Ernestina have glowed with passion for another, had not her noble husband so desired it. It was his pride his friend should know and taste her loveliness. He could not bear the thought that such vast treasure should be lavished on himself alone, when its profusion of richness not only promised abundance to the friend of his heart, but left him not poorer in the offering."

"Unequalled Baron," said the page, again affected by the recollection of his lost lord's worth. "But few are they who would have the generosity of heart to act like this. Believe me, Sir Monk, of this great confidence, in one so young, so honored in the gift, I shall never prove unworthy."

"Well I know it is a confidence not misplaced," said the Monk-Knight, kindly. "I know your almost filial love for the Lady Ernestina, and I wished to yield you comfort in the knowledge that she was not doomed to pine in hopeless widowhood."

"Words cannot tell," said Rudolph, passionately, "the joy you have imparted to me. You will not now, Sir Monk, ask of Saladin to let me free. Bondage like mine no freedom could purchase. Even as your passion is for the Lady Ernestina, so is mine for the wife of Saladin."

"But," remarked the Monk, "smiling, beautiful as she is, the wife of Saladin is old enough to be your mother."

"Ah! dear Sir Monk, that is one reason why I so deeply love her," answered the boy, coloring. "Besides, if it were otherwise, such beauty, far from being lessened, must be increased by years."

"Strange, precocious boy," said the Monk-Knight, regarding him attentively, "come nearer and let me whisper into your ear."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the startled Rudolph, when the communication had been made. "Forgive me—forgive me, Sir Monk, for my fault. Oh, how could I ever have divined this to be the case?"

"I have ample proof of the fact," returned Abdallah; "yet how ob-

tained, dear Rudolph, you must not ask me—yet fear not my displeasure. The past cannot be recalled; therefore why poison the future with a vain regret. Frankly tell me then. I know from your own lips that you love Zuleima. Has proof been given that she returns your love?"

"It has," said the page, coloring deeply, beneath the inquiring gaze of the Monk-Knight.

"Enough, dear boy. A deeper tie than friendship then connects us. The voluptuous mistress of Abdallah feeds her fond love within the arms of a blooming page, whom he calls his friend, and who is dearer to his heart by reason of the very love he bears her."

"The ardent and beautiful boy threw himself upon the bosom of the Monk-Knight, and reclining his burning cheek upon his ample shoulder, gave utterance to the deep, the heartfelt gratitude that filled his soul at this generous conduct."

"Nay, Rudolph, as I said before, the past cannot be recalled; what has been cannot be effaced. It is for this reason that I rather rejoice in, than condemn, the mutual passion you have conceived. Had it yet been ungratified, I could not have counselled it. But the fullest indulgence having been given to the strong feelings of your hearts, I not only do not object, but I approve. Rather would I that she were your mistress than Saladin's wife; for there is almost profanity in the thought of her being pressed to the heart of the cruel, the inhuman man, who so mercilessly and so wantonly slew hundreds of the noblest warriors of the Cross. Go," he resumed, after a short pause; "go to the cherished sharer of your unlawful love, and without making known to her our secret, say that much I desire an interview. Take this ring and place it upon her finger. She will understand the token. Let the hour be the first after midnight. You must keep watch and careful guard against events. From my own lips must she know that we part forever. One last embrace, dear Rudolph. Perchance this meeting is our last."

CHAPTER XX.

ALL was dark as on the preceding evening, when Zuleima, understanding well the meaning of the return of the ring, through Rudolph, gently put aside the curtains of Abdallah's tent. He stood near to receive her, and then, in silence, led her to an ottoman at the opposite extremity. She was much agitated, and as his arm encircled her as they walked, he could feel the heaving of her bosom. For some time they did not speak; a consciousness of the past, and of the guilty but dear and sacred tie which united them, seemed to pervade the breasts of both; but this, so far from inspiring Abdallah with coldness for Zuleima, only filled him with the strongest sentiment of a pure fraternal love. His feeling was so new, so strange, that it was indescribable. No mere passion influenced him now, and yet

the recollection of his knowledge of her beauty, only rendered her the more dear to him. That which had been done, had been done in frenzy and therefore with no consciousness of wrong, he pressed her to his manly chest, and covered her with endearments, that, unmingled with one impure thought, were sources of the most exquisite pleasure to both. To the past they scarcely dared to recur, and when the erring imagination would for an instant prove recreant to their will, they as quickly banished the picture from their minds, not shrinking coldly from contact with each other, but by increasing their abandonment to the new and delightful emotion which had now displaced all others in their hearts. Deep, therefore, was the tenderness resulting from this. Passion had become love, less fiery, but more absorbing in its nature. It seemed to them as their hearts throbbed against each other, as if they had been intimate from childhood—never had been strangers. Anxious again to behold the noble features of her lover, which she never yet dared to examine with attention, Zuleima lighted a small dark lantern which she had brought with her. This she turned upon his face. A soft-toned and serene expression of benignity met her gaze, so perfectly fascinating, that, despite of herself, the soul of Zuleima was troubled. She threw her arm around his neck and burst into tears.

"Zuleima," murmured the Monk-Knight, as he played with the redundant masses of her beautiful hair, "I sent you the ring you gave me, that you might understand wherefore it was I sought you here, and at this hour. Ah! disappoint me not in this newly-created expectation of my longing heart, but assure me beyond a possibility of doubt, that you will be my sister, that as a sister I may adore you. Be what you will to others—aye, dearest," and he looked at her with an expression she could not misunderstand, "what I know you are—confess yourself to me as the ardent devotee of passion—tell me this, and yet your sins shall, in my eyes, be white and chaste as the pure snow of heaven, if that you prove to me also, that you are in truth the sister that my long-desolated heart so craves to worship."

Abdallah spoke passionately, and yet the placidity of his brow was unchanged, the expression of his features showed the calm within, while the warm words that fell from his lips, marked the strong sentiment of his soul.

"My noble brother," returned Zuleima, with a trembling voice, and gazing even as one fascinated upon his unruffled brow, which mocked the warmth of the words he uttered, "blessed be the hour when I gave that ring—blessed be the guilty happiness which led to its offering. It was ordained by fate. Never would the brother have embraced the sister, in that holiest affection which clings around the heart, had not the strong desire of the man called forth the undying gratitude of the woman."

"Thus it is," said Abdallah, as he enfolded her to his heart, with an earnestness that he never showed before, "that good often results from evil; and what good so great, as that which gives to the lone heart the pure devotion of a sister's love. But tell me, dear Zuleima, where were you born—where were passed your early days?"

"Far from this, dear brother: in Morocco."

"In Morocco!" repeated the Monk-Knight, with gratified surprise, and pressing Zuleima closer to his heart.

"Yes; in Morocco."

"And your father's name?" inquired Abdallah.

"Aph Saphadin, a distinguished warrior of the Crescent."

"My noble countryman!" exclaimed the Monk, "I knew and loved him well. Zuleima—Zuleima—you are indeed my sister. Ah! what a tide of overpowering joy rushes over my full heart, and makes me feel, for the first time, as though I was something more than human. Can what I experience be common to all men? No; it cannot be. It is the dawning of a new light upon my long-darkened soul. Hitherto I have lived alone—almost hateful to myself, but now—now, the heart that has been so long dead to every emotion not inspired by the Church, is filled with two loves for those, whom, in the strength of my bigotry, I so late abhorred. One maddens me with desire for her beauty; the other, suffuses my whole being with tenderness. But tell me farther, my own cherished sister, of your father, and how you became the wife of Saladin."

"The history is soon told," remarked Zuleima. "When I was ten years old, circumstances connected with the service led my father into Syria, where he took up his abode. No one remained of the family but myself, for all had perished either by the sword or the plague. My father was old and enfeebled, and having been a friend of Shiracouch, the uncle of Saladin, the latter chieftain called to see him on his successful entry into Syria. I was then eighteen; he became enamoured of me, and soon obtained my father's sanction that I should be his wife. Then, I liked him not, for he was too stern of mind for me; but my father urging the defenceless state in which I should be left in the event of his decease, which was almost daily to be expected, and the total loss of his own wealth, induced me to give my consent. Soon afterwards, I was summoned to the death-bed of my father, who, deeming from the high position I now occupied, that I should have ample opportunity to become a permanent favorite, gave me this talismanic ring, which, on that delicious night, dear brother, I placed upon your finger, and which I now beg you again to accept. Although you may spurn and laugh at its power, yet my faith is firm that in the hour of trial and of danger, it will keep you ever safe and harmless. You cannot know the delight I experience in transferring it from my possession to yours. Keep it, dear brother, for my sake. At last, then," she fondly continued, "the great wish of my heart is granted. How long have I pined for the presence of a loved brother, to whom I could confide all my thoughts, my wishes, and my hopes—make him the guardian of my heart's secrets—and here at length have I found him in the noblest of men."

"Alas! dear Zuleima, you have found only to lose him. After this night we behold each other no more."

"Oh! no—no; she exclaimed, throwing herself upon his bared chest, "it must not be; I cannot bear to part with you. Dear, dear Abdallah, you must not go."

"Impossible, my sister," he answered; "Saladin has given me until to-

morrow's dawn to stay within his camp. Then, do I take me hence from Palestine."

"True, I recollect," she returned, in a faint tone, and looking very pale "you seek the Lady Ernestina. In her arms, all thoughts of Zuleima will be forgotten."

"Forgotten—no; but oft remembered," mildly pursued the Monk. "The Lady Ernestina shall know all—the unintentional crime she herself provoked—its repentance, and the holy and fraternal love which now has purified our veins. The Lady Ernestina will surely love you."

"I know not how it is, Abdallah," she murmured; "but though my thoughts, like yours, are chastened by the knowledge of the new and holy tie that binds us, I could even wish I were that woman of the West—she taking my likeness and I transformed to hers."

The Monk-Knight shook his head, and looked at her gravely, yet tenderly, while he imprinted a kiss upon her forehead. "Zuleima, your soul is the abode of a voluptuousness that well becomes the rich luxuriance of your form. True, I am but a novice in these things, and yet, methinks, it were impossible for one so framed to wake tumultuous passion in the soul to be aught other than you are. Love as you will—let boundless pleasure wrap your senses in delight—give fullest freedom to your desiring will—lavish your beauties on him who most can prize them—not only does Abdallah, the sharer of your purer love, counsel but approve this; for your joy must be his joy. Do all this then, or more. Be a woman in the dearest sense of the endearing term, but outrage not the laws of nature by loving, where to love is a crime. In future, as regards myself, you must ever deem as if the past had never been."

"Nay, nay, my beloved brother," she murmured; "that were asking too much. I feel that the past can never be restored. I wish it not, but memory will dwell upon the joy despite of every effort to enchain her."

"Impassioned woman, how differently has the past life of each been filled up. Mine in abstinence and mortification; yours in free and unrestrained indulgence of the most endearing passions of our nature. Tell me, my sister, whence has it arisen, that being of the same race, our natures were so different?"

"Your own Christian hordes have done this," replied the blushing Zuleima. "They who came to propagate the religion of Christ, have rather advanced the interests of Satan. Living temples of lust have they made of the Saracen mother and the Saracen maid. Hitherto the minds of the Moslem women had been pure, but eventually they became tainted with the immorality of the wives and daughters of their conquerors. Women and girls became so subjected to the will of the followers of the Cross, that that which they at first regarded with fear and horror, became at length a desire, a necessity. Instead of shrinking in dismay from a ravisher, maddened with his gross desires, the mother, decked in gorgeous apparel, would tolerate even in the presence of her daughter, those transports for the indulgence of which her soul sought an excuse in the violence that was threatened. Excited and encouraged by the example of their mothers, the daughters seldom failed to yield to solicitation, until in the end the land became one vast

theatre of rape and adultery. Nor was this confined to the lower classes of the people. The most favored by riches, and the most delicate by nature, were willing sharers of the fierce passions of their Christian ravishers, and many of them so loved those who had compelled them to their own happiness, that they would make any sacrifice to serve them."

"What a picture of our own surpassing infamy," exclaimed the Monk-Knight. "Strange that I should have been all this time in Palestine, and remain ignorant of these excesses."

"Not strange, dear Abdallah," resumed Zuleima; "for you were too holy—too devout—too much given to purer things, to have obtained even a knowledge of the evil. But now of myself. I too had witnessed those scenes. I too had beheld voluptuous, and beautiful, and delicate women, who afterwards complained of the violence offered to them, yielding themselves up, in fullest abandonment of gratified desire, to the fierce men who possessed them. Young as I was, the recollection sank deeply into my heart. I had always been of ardent temperament, and the increase of years increased my natural tenderness of soul, which was rather fed by the intensity of emotion of the ravished than of the ravisher. Time passed—my imagination only was seduced—I created to myself an image—a beau-ideal, which I invested with every attribute of excellence, and to which, had it been possible to endow it with vitality, I should have surrendered myself body and soul. This was the dream of my girlhood, before I became the wife of Saladin. Loving me for a brief season with all the ardor of his nature, he soon developed the powerful and dominant passion of my soul; but he was not the ideal Christian knight, whom I had invested with super-human beauty. After a few weeks' possession, Saladin's manner grew colder, and he treated me with the same indifference which he extended to his other wives. It was soon after that I became the inmate of the tent of the French knight."

"In whom, sweet Zuleima," said Abdallah, as he clasped her closer to his breast; "you found your beau-ideal?"

"I did," replied his sister, coloring deeply; "but how know you that?"

"I saw it," said the Monk-Knight. "I saw, and knelt, and prayed for forgiveness of your mutual sin."

"Ah, that could not have been a sin," murmured Zuleima. "For the first time in my life I was happy."

"Let me not dwell on the recollection," exclaimed the Monk-Knight, with sudden energy. "Ha! Zuleima, my sister, this at least cannot be crime."

His left arm encircled and drew her to his herculean chest. Her moist lips were upon his. His right hand unrestrained, and trembling more and more at every instant, wandered over her form.

"This to remind me ever of you in absence," said Abdallah.

Zuleima lay nearly fainting on his chest. Her only answer was a sigh.

"Oh! it is so sweet to have a sister—to press her to one's heart," remarked Abdallah, after a pause.

"Not sweeter than to possess and to take pride in the possession of a noble

and generous brother," said Zuleima, tenderly. "Would that I had been more like yourself."

"Had you been other than you are, I should not have loved you as I do," said the Monk-Knight.

Zuleima, you love that favorite of your beau-ideal—and the dear object of my own affection—the handsome Rudolph. Nay, blush not, sweetest, I know it all."

"I do, Abdallah—next to yourself, I love that dear boy more than aught beside on earth."

"More than Saladin!"

"Yes, more than Saladin. The feelings they inspire are widely different. The one passion; the other tenderness, softness. There, do I not give you all my confidence? But ah! brought up as you have been, my brother, in the holy cloister—acknowledging not, sharing not the vices which the followers of Christ have introduced into every dwelling of their Eastern conquests, you must, you will, think me very wicked."

"Not so, my dearest Zuleima. There was a time, and but recently, when I should have thought so; but a new light has dawned upon my awakened soul. Never can that be wickedness which emanates from Nature; nor can the sweet infidelity of a confiding woman, whose heart is filled with kindness, be accounted crime by her. Nothing is criminal that does not violate the natural law of God. Incest does infringe that law, and therefore is it criminal. Not so with love. Nature recoils not from the passion, and they who acknowledge most its influence are those to whom God has given souls and feelings worthy rather of the possession of angels than of human beings."

"And do you really think this, Abdallah?" said the wife of Saladin, throwing her arms around the neck of her brother. "Ah, even so have I ever believed, and hence it is I place no restraint upon my will."

"On my hope of Heaven, I do," returned the Monk-Knight, impressively. "Rapid has been my enfranchisement from the fetters of prejudice. I believe that in creating the world, the infinite God had for His ultimate object the gratification and approval of the wondrous works of His will, and that the crowning feature of his joy is in the contemplation of that mysterious and hallowing love of sex for sex, which pervades His universe. Nay, more, I believe He has given it only to a favored few to realize the full fruition of that which we call desire, yet which, in fact, is a divine mystery without a name."

"Ah! how truly spoken," murmured the tender Zuleima. "But tell me, brother, can the violation of the shrinking maid and unwilling matron find favor then in the sight of Heaven?"

"Most surely not," replied Abdallah. "The man who murders, the man who robs, the man who slanders, does injury to his neighbor, which is forbidden by the law of nature and of God. In like manner, the man who compels a woman to his lust, does wrong unto that neighbor whom he is enjoined to love even as himself. But it must not be said that Heaven disapproves the utmost intensity of that passion, which emanating from God alone, is mutually shared."

"It cannot be said," remarked Zuleima, smiling sweetly upon her brother, "that the practice which prevails with the Christian women in Palestine, differs much from the lax principles of the warm-tempered Saracen."

"No; we all know, that from the queen downwards, there is scarce a Christian matron who has not committed error, or a maiden who has not surrendered her purity. Still there is this difference between my theory and their practice; that the latter carries with it a consciousness of sin, while the former views it in the light of a natural impulse. But to return to Rudolph—You love him?"

"Yes, tenderly do I love him—even as though he were my own child."

"Nay, naughty Zuleima," observed the Monk-Knight; "there riots your guilty and intemperate imagination again. But tell me. Were Saladin no more, do you think you could love the boy sufficiently to become his wife, according to the rites of the Christian church?"

"Most joyfully," she answered; "but wherefore the question, dear Abdallah?"

"You would then forsake Moslemism for him."

"I would. Nor great would be the sacrifice. Too long have I beheld Christian and Moslem, deluging the world with blood, to believe in the usefulness of either. I worship but the holy and eternal Allah. But since you will that I should become the former, when Saladin is no more, it shall be done: yet, again, wherefore brother?"

"That, as Rudolph's wife, you may quit this land of blood for ever, and pass your future days in fair Auvergne, near your brother and his Ernestina."

"Will the dog follow his master? Will a churchman look to his living? Doubt me not. I will."

The Monk-Knight rose from the ottoman; he went to the entrance of the tent, and in a low voice, called the name of the boy. The watchful page approached, when Abdallah, taking his hand, led him in silence to the ottoman whereon Zuleima still reclined, holding the lamp, so as to throw its light upon their faces, while her own remained partially hidden in shade.

"Zuleima," he said, as he placed her hand in that of the page, "with the ideas you entertain of Moslemism the tie that unites you to Saladin is but an empty ceremony—binding only as the heart dictates. You love this boy?"

"Tenderly, sweetly, fondly," she replied, in trembling tones.

"You embrace Christianity then; you renounce the creed of the Prophet?"

"I do. Solemnly do I embrace the one, and renounce the other."

"My own dear, generous mother!" exclaimed Rudolph, excitedly.

"Then let the wife of Saladin, who is no wife in the eyes of the Christian Church, seeing that she is one of many, be the wife of Rudolph. In my priestly office do I pronounce you such. Rudolph, place this ring, the dearest relic of a departed father, upon the hand of Zuleima. There, the benediction of a brother's love be upon you."

The boy threw himself upon her bosom; he pressed his fresh and fragrant lips to hers, and the joy of his heart was complete.

"And in what relation do I now stand to Saladin?" asked Zuleima, when she had freed herself from Rudolph's ardent embrace.

"In none the Church approves," said the Monk-Knight solemnly. "But the dawn is beginning to break. Rudolph, when Saladin dies, or even before, should it be possible, follow with Zuleima to Auvergne. I shall expect you."

"Ah! trust me well, Sir Monk. My impatience will not wait the death of Saladin. The first occasion I shall seize and bear the wife you have given me far from his arms and presence."

"Enough!" returned the Monk-Knight. "Time presses. If your absence from your tent be remarked, Zuleima, we are lost."

One last and final embrace, and Zuleima and Rudolph stealthily regained the tent of the former.

CHAPTER XXI.

Six months had passed since the events recorded in the last chapter. It was a beautiful evening in early autumn, such as has been peculiar to the south of France throughout all ages. A great fête was in progress in the chateau of Auvergne, for it was the anniversary of the marriage of de Bois-court—the loved owner of the domain with the Lady Ernestina, and the latter had resolved to commemorate the day in a manner worthy of her distant and much-loved lord. Such nobles with their dames, of the province, as had not joined the Crusade, and a host of retainers who had been left behind to till the vast extent of soil constituting the seigniory, were now present to enjoy the fête, and the courts and rooms of the chateau were filled unto crowding. Wine flowed in abundance, and the table literally groaned with food of every kind, from the wild boar of Brittany to the delicate ortolan of Spain. The fête itself was a masked one, and gay and fancy costumes among the higher, and droll and grotesque caricatures among the lower, formed a motley assemblage, wherein the pomp and ceremonies of rank were, for the moment, laid aside, while one united desire seemed to animate all—that of contributing to the enjoyment of the hour.

The Lady Ernestina herself—the confessed queen of the fête—was gorgeously, magnificently dressed. The bottom of her robe of rich purple velvet was trimmed with strips of ermine of the most costly kind, and just narrow and delicate enough to take from the heaviness which would otherwise have been given to it. The front, cut very low, and displaying all the rich contour of her glowing bosom, was bordered with wide and drooping lace of the same texture, and in her dark, auburn hair, she wore a single white rose. Her moulded arms were bare, and, like the full bosom, the tight sleeves of her robe were trimmed deeply with the same rich lace. Whenever she moved, the witchery of her exquisite form, fascinated every heart, while as the half-closed and long-lashed eye, languishing even in the excitement of the occasion, endorsed the sweetness of the words that

flowed from rosy lips never opened but to disclose the rows of pearl that lay within the casket, the troubled mind would wander, and paint in imagination the deep perfection of the beauteous whole.

Near her side, and watching her enchanting movements with the anxiety of a lover, jealous that the regards of her mistress should be too much bestowed upon another, was the gentle and dark-haired Henriette. Apparently, and indeed avowedly, she was there to receive the commands of her mistress in whatever related to the arrangement of the fête, but a close observer might have seen that a sweeter influence caused her to take delight and gratification in the office, than the mere desire to acquit herself of a duty assigned to her.

It was towards evening when the guests, the male portion tired out with athletic games and wine—the female with rout and laughter, and romping, and the exhilarating but fatiguing dance, began to withdraw. The hours of rest were then early, and scarce had the twilight left them, when the vast chateau, which had hitherto resounded with the voices of hundreds, was silent, as if a sudden spell had come over its now deserted rooms and corridors, where the lightest footfall might be heard in sharp echoes from the basement to the roof.

Henriette and the Baroness were alone. The eyes of the younger were bent upon the sweet form of her mistress with an expression of tenderness and admiration, which brought a deeper blush—she could not tell wherefore—to her already animated cheek.

"Well, dearest pet," she asked, "how did our little fête find favor? Was it worthy of my noble husband?"

Henriette burst into tears.

"What is the matter, love? The exertions of the day have fatigued you—made you nervous. Compose yourself,"—and she kissed her fondly on the brow.

"Oh, no! it is not that," she said; "It is because I love you so much, dear lady, that I feel thus. If I have done my little duty to-day, it has been mechanically. My heart was not in the work. I was too much occupied in thinking how unhappy I was, each time, in being away from you. Oh! dear Lady Ernestina, I cannot find words to express the fullness of my regard for you."

All this was said passionately, yet in a gentle tone of voice.

"Henriette, my child," returned the Baroness, in a tone of deep emotion, as she caught her fondly to her heart, "you certainly do love me very dearly."

"Ah! dearest Lady Ernestina, you cannot conceive how much I adore you. I worship you—I always think of you. I could desire to do nothing else in life than to gaze on you. Should I ever be so sinful as to entertain the slightest doubt of the all-perfection of God, and of His goodness, I shall only have to call up the image of the Baroness de Boiscourt, with her beautiful and redundant hair flowing over her polished shoulders, and overspreading her graceful form."

"Dear, sweet enthusiast," said the Lady Ernestina, pressing her with warmth, even passion—"what an extraordinary girl you are!"

"Ah! pursued Henriette, with momentarily heightening color, "what beauty, what holiness, what wonderfulness of conception of the glorious God, who, to crown the loveliness of the daughters, to whom he has given every other attribute of perfection, has added a power of fascination, which subdues the soul—which angels even must adore."

Again the Baroness pressed the lovely and half-fainting girl to her heart. Henriette's right arm was thrown around her neck—her left hand held and pressed that of her mistress. Her own sweet lips met those poutingly offered by the enchantress upon whose heaving bosom her flushed face reposed.

"Methinks," said the Baroness, playfully, and after a few minutes of unbroken silence on either hand—"that Rudolph, or even my noble husband, would like to have pillowed on their ampler chests the burning cheek that presses upon my own. What say you, dearest," pressing the hand she held grasped within her own. "Which should it be—de Boiscourt or Rudolph?"

"Neither," murmured Henriette, smiling, and looking into her eyes. "The love I bear to you is sweeter, holier far, than ruder man can comprehend. Rather would I view the loosened masses of that Madonna-like hair while pillowed on the breast that heaves to mine, than seek idolatry from those you name."

"Child," said the Lady Ernestina, with blushing cheek and animated glance, while a heavenly smile played upon her lips, "you will seduce me. Yet be it so, love," and she wiped the juices of her lips away in her kisses. "You shall sleep with me again to-night, and our thoughts and speech shall be of Palestine."

"Of Palestine, ah! true, I had forgotten. Dear Lady Ernestina, this word reminds me of something I had injunctions not to break to you until the guests had all departed. Alas! but now I should have told you; but I know not how it is, I forget every thing when not near you—more so when near."

"What is it, Henriette?" inquired the Lady Ernestina, eagerly. "News of my lord? Speak, dear, what have you to impart?"

"As I went to execute your message to the *garde chasse* for bouquets for the lady guests, I found him in conversation with a man of such noble and majestic mien, that I was awed as one who gazed upon a superior being. He was disguised, I presume, in compliance with the fashion of the fête, as a monk, and bore upon his breast an iron crucifix."

"But his features?" interrupted the Lady Ernestina, with an expression of deep interest.

"These I could not see," continued Henriette: "for, as I have just said, he wore, in common with the guests around, a mask, which was of the same dark color with his robe. There was something, my dear lady, so imposing in his mien and stature, that I hesitated to advance."

"That, holy father, is the Baroness's friend and confidant," said Picard, evidently replying to some previous question. "Since you will not enter and partake of the hospitalities which are open to every body, this being the anniversary of our dear absent lord's marriage with the Lady Ernestina, you may deliver what message you wish to her, and it will be straight conveyed to the loved mistress of the chateau d'Auvergne. Ah! ça, come forward,

Mademoisell: Henriette, please, and take a message from this holy monk to the mistress."

"My heart beat, with I know not what; the mild dignity of the stranger imposed upon me greatly. Tremblingly I began to advance, when he stepped rather quickly forward to meet me, as I thought, in order not to be overheard by Picard, in what he was about to communicate.

"My child," he said, in tones of such sweetness, that I longed to behold the lips that uttered them, "tell the Lady Ernestina de Boiscourt that the Italian Monk, Gonzales, a friend of the noble Baron, her husband, brings tidings from the Holy Land, which only can he breathe in secrecy in her ear. I would have entered even now to her, but fain would spare the joy that reigns within. A morn of gladness may well precede a noon of lamentation. Tell, then, your sweet mistress, that at the tenth hour this night, when all is still within the chateau, I will return, and, announced only by yourself, make known the purport of my mission."

"I will, Lord Monk," I replied, in some confusion; for I really was so overcome by his manner, that I scarcely knew what I said.

"Remember, child," he added, taking and affectionately pressing my hand, at which I was the more confused and flattered, "what I say to you passes but to —. Ha!" he exclaimed, suddenly starting back and involuntarily removing his mask as if to obtain a better view. "Who is that?"

"Ah! my lady what a face. It was such a one as we see in representations of Christ. If I could love a man better than I do you, I declare that I should have loved him. He was obliged to repeat the questions, for so completely was I absorbed in the contemplation of his calm and saint-like features, that I could not answer him. At last turning to see whom he meant, I saw you standing at a distant window talking to the Countess of Clermont.

"That, Holy Father," I replied, "is the Baroness de Boiscourt. Oh, if you only knew how beautiful and how good she is, almost as ardently as I do, you would love her."

"The Lady Ernestina," murmured the Monk, turning pale as death—"beautiful—love her—did you say I loved her. God bless you, my child," and he imprinted a moist kiss upon my brow. "Remember the tenth hour—yet speak not of this, I charge you, until the guests have departed."

"Then hurriedly resuming his mask, he turned round, and slipping a piece of money into the hand of Picard, walked slowly out of the garden and disappeared, while I gave the necessary directions for the flowers."

"What can all this mean? Who is he, and what news can he bring from Palestine that concerns me?" remarked the Baroness, with an air of anxiety. "Henriette, you should have told me this before. But no, I have forgotten, he desired you not."

"True, my Lady. He seemed not to wish to interrupt the gaiety of the entertainment."

"The Monk Gonzales—an Italian too!" pursued the Lady Ernestina, thoughtfully, and speaking aside. "A man of noble mien and stature. Can it really be he. Stop, beating heart. Gonzales Abdallah, or Abdallah Gonzales! But then he does not call himself more than a friend—an ordi-

nary friend of my husband, while he, who saved his life so oft in contest, is the second-self of my noble and generous lord. Besides, where should be that holy man, on whom my thoughts have so long dwelt, but with the dear Alfred, at whose desire these new wild feelings have entered in my soul. But time will tell. Some wandering monk, perhaps, who tired of his long pilgrimage in Palestine, has sought repose within this peaceful land. Henriette," she said, more immediately addressing the young girl, "you say this stranger will be here at the tenth hour!"

"He so stated to me, dear Lady."

"Then, sweetest, assist me to prepare in my ante-chamber above—the fittest place for secrecy, since secrecy is sought by him—some small refreshment for this sacred monk. Doubtless his fare in travelling through Palestine has not been of the choice kind of our fête to-day. A portion of this, with wine of the vineyards of Champagne, and of the generous and aroma-breathing Burgundy, we will convey thither ourselves. Who brings good news from those we love in Palestine, should find us no niggards in tender of hospitality."

"And surely, not such a holy father of our church, and one so proper in his manliness," replied the sweet Henriette, blushing at her own words. "Take not the trouble, dear Lady Ernestina, that office I will so direct as to meet your fullest wishes."

"Not so, my child," returned the Baroness, as she again embraced her. "It were well the serfs were not disturbed, but suffered calmly to enjoy the sleep to which their recent toil so well disposes them. None, as you say, must know of his approach, therefore none must witness the preparation for another guest. Come, girl, we must wait upon ourselves."

Soon the necessary arrangements were made in the room which has been described in a former chapter as adjoining the nuptial chamber of the Lord and Lady of Auvergne. The hour had nearly arrived, and with each succeeding minute, the Lady Ernestina, who had thrown herself into the large fauteuil, was filled with an anxiety, she sought in vain to repress. Henriette had gone below, to answer the first summons at the door, and to conduct the Monk in silence to her mistress.

At length the light and subdued tread of human feet was heard without.

"Oh God, what a presentiment," murmured the Lady Ernestina, with irrepressible emotion. "My heart tells me that the Monk Gonzales is Abdallah, the warm friend of my own loved lord. What means this? Ah! what is to become of me? To what trials, to what temptations am I to be exposed? Come in," she said, in a trembling voice, in answer to the low knock of the cautious Henriette.

The door opened—the young girl entered, announced the Monk Gonzales, still masked, and then withdrew.

"Do I then, at last, stand in the presence of the Lady Ernestina de Bois-court," said the stranger, after a short silence, and in tones that went to the heart of his auditor.

"I am, indeed, her you name," she replied, while, with winning grace, she motioned her questioner to be seated. "Holy father, I have received your message, and gladly will I hear the news from Palestine, if that news

bring tidings of my dear lord's health. But first, I pray you, let not the features of the friend of my noble husband longer wear disguise. Remove your mask, Sir Monk, and taste of the poor hospitality the wife of the brave de Boiscourt offers."

"Nay, nay, sweet lady. I doff the now unneedful guise at your command; but who could hunger or crave the common food of nature, when in the presence of her who makes the heart forget all grosser appetite!"

As he spoke, the stranger removed the mask, exposing to her full and startled view, a noble countenance. She had risen on his entrance, but now advancing, and taking her hand, he caused her to resume her seat.

The Lady Ernestina regarded him closely. That placid brow, those benevolent and radiant features—that humble yet majestic mien, were even what her imagination had so long treasured—and when he took her hand, there ran a lightning tremor through her frame, which caused the color to forsake her cheek, and her half-closed eye to sink beneath the calm, fixed gaze of admiration, which seemed to penetrate her very soul. Suddenly making an effort to rally, she remarked, somewhat mockingly, yet in a troubled tone:

"Methinks the Monk Gonzales has learned much courtesy in the blood-stained fields of Palestine, and that the cowl has oft been thrown aside, to tilt in honor of his mistress in the ranks of chivalry. You said,"—and she looked earnestly, yet modestly at him—"that Gonzales is your name."

"Even so, noble lady. The Monk Gonzales, of no repute I grant, is still the friend of the noble Baron de Boiscourt, nor quite unworthy to expect a fairer judgment of his heart and purpose than what these words convey."

"Nay, holy father, pardon me," she replied with a momentarily increasing color, and in a trembling voice, for her soul was touched—mine were but the words of playfulness. "But to your news from Palestine: I am ready to hear it. Yet I pray you, ere you begin, let me pour forth a goblet of rich Burgundy, since grosser food you shun. This should not be. As the friend of my dear husband, it were meet you should partake even of the remnant of a feast, given in honor of this our wedding-day."

"Nay, fair lady. I knew it not. Here is to the nuptials of the Lady Ernestina de Boiscourt with the husband who adores her," he exclaimed, as he drained off the full goblet she had poured out for him. "May to-morrow's sun not rise, before she presses to her panting heart him, whose love for her will be enduring as the arch of heaven."

"Ah! what mean you?" almost shrieked the Baroness. "Is this the news you bring? Is my soul's lord returned? Has he come with you—and are you here to prepare me for his arrival? Speak—speak, I charge you, speak, and yet kill me not with happiness."

Involuntarily she had risen, and now leaned her head confidently—gratefully upon his shoulder.

"Even as you have divined, lady," he answered with the same calm expression of face, while his breast was filled with the most thrilling sensations. He felt her sweet breath fanning his neck, and saw her blue-veined bosom developed in all its richness of luxuriance, as it rose and fell with her deep emotion. "Yes," he continued, with a depth of intonation that startled her,

"this night will your adoring husband behold the glorious beauty of his long-widowed wife—the divine treasure of her all-glorious form shall be his to-night and for ever."

Receding from the warmth of his language, and the passionate embrace with which it was accompanied, the Lady Ernestina drew suddenly back. Gonzales remarked this, and immediately changing his tone and manner for a bearing better suited to his holy character, withdrew his arm, and resuming his placid exterior, said—

"Pardon me, lady, if in my joy at the coming happiness of my friend, I should have seemed to forget myself by too strong an expression of rejoicement for his sake. Lady, when you are quite prepared to listen to the intelligence with which I am charged I shall reveal it."

"Quickly, then, Sir Monk," she returned. "I languish with impatience. But where is my lord? Why comes he not?"

"Not two hours hence, and you shall hold him to your loving heart, lady," said the Monk, struggling painfully to subdue his inward emotion. "Meanwhile, I will recount both the cause of his coming, and the necessity for strict secesy which attaches to his being here. Listen then, lady, I shall be brief, for the night already wanes."

He drew his chair near the fauteuil of the Lady Ernestina, and thus began.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Has the news yet reached Auvergne of the battle of Tiberias, and the subsequent fall of Jerusalem, sweet Lady?"

"Of Jerusalem! of the holy city!" repeated the Lady Ernestina, with astonishment. "Can this really be?"

"Alas!" returned the Monk, "the mother of Christian Palestine is no more. Where late the Cross triumphant floated, the hated Crescent now unfolds its emblem to the eye."

"Sad news, indeed," she answered; "but what of my husband? He has escaped, has he not? The giant arm of Abdallah; he whom, pardon me, Sir Monk, I had hoped you were, that noble, that majestic man to whom my grateful heart does homage, next akin to love, defended him in peril. Was it not so?"

"Lady," said the Monk, again taking her hand and smiling one of his subduing smiles; "you forget I have stated that, ere two hours have passed, your noble lord will taste of Heaven in these arms."

"True, true," said the Lady Ernestina, coloring deeply, "but the tidings of the loss of Jerusalem have so confused me, that I scarcely know the words I utter."

"At the battle of Tiberias—the most fearful onset of the war in Palestine—the noble Baron's life was three times saved by the Monk-Knight Abdallah, of whom you speak. Alas! taken prisoner, with three hun-

dred Knights of the Temple, and an equal number of St. John, that bosom friend of your loved lord, for a while spared by the cruel order of Saladin, perished with his comrades by the scimeter."

"Abdallah slain! Oh God!" shrieked the Lady Ernestina, falling upon her knees, and raising her clasped hands. "Baron, holy Monk, this weakness, but in your character of confessor I reveal to you my inmost soul—I have taught myself to love that warrior with a love not inferior to that I bear my lord. My second self was his. Had you been he—and such I ever deemed he was—then had my happiness been complete, even though a thousand Jerusalems had fallen!"

The Monk rose—he paced the room—and with an air of agitation that caused the Baroness to apprehend she had done wrong in avowing the secret of her feelings to one who seemed desirous of creating an equal interest in her bosom. The conflict of her emotions was severe.

"Tell me again," he almost whispered, so low yet clear was the tone in which he spoke: "Repeat to me, that had I been Abdallah your soul would have been my own. That you would have had him to resemble me!"

"Oh! ask me not, holy father, what I would have done. It is enough that you know I love him, and that I have always fancied him the noble and majestic Monk, which it were vain to deny you are."

"In Palestine we have passed for twins," returned Gonzales. "So much resembling that our brethren in arms have scarce distinguished."

"Ah! but you are not Abdallah," sighed the Baroness; "you are not the same valiant Monk-Knight who stole into my heart through oft-repeated saving of my husband's life, whose battle cry in war of late has ever been my name. Yes! yes, holy father, with a strong love I loved him!"

"Well have you been informed, noble lady. It is not for a brother monk to wrest one feather from the plume of merit that adorns Abdallah's memory. In feats of war he had no equal, while the prowess of his gigantic arm was the admiration and the wonder of all who witnessed it. In the great battle of Tiberias his war-cry in the thickest of the fight, and side to side with the noble Baron, your husband, was "the Lady Ernestina," and not until vast numbers had overpowered him, was he compelled to yield himself up a prisoner."

"Ha! can you then wonder," said the beautiful wife of de Boiscourt, as the tears coursed slowly down her cheeks, "that such a man, sinful though the weakness of my heart was, should command my warmest love and gratitude? Hear me, Gonzales, while I confess it. Had you used deceit; had you come to me as Abdallah, the bearer of a message from my lord in Palestine, and wooing to your love, I should exultingly have fallen. I feel no remorse—no shame in avowing this, for well am I convinced that the generous de Boiscourt would approve rather than condemn. Holy father, you have now my secret, which no member of the Church may venture to betray."

"One word more," asked Gonzales, as he threw upon her an expres-

sion of such anxious love, that in her inmost heart she wished she had not divulged his name. "What would be your choice, were it possible to bring Abdallah to your arms this night? The Baron or the Monk?"

"The Monk! said you. Oh! torture me not with the vain thought! Make me not say that which shows inferior passion for my noble husband."

"And what, dear Lady Ernestina, should be my own reward?"

"I cannot name it to you," replied the Baroness, after a short pause, and with a crimson brow. "You must imagine it."

"Ah! that I had the power to raise the dead, dear lady," and Gonzales knelt at her feet and pressed her knees: "can you not teach your love so to impress my image on your heart, that you may in me bestow your sweetness on Abdallah?"

"Never, never!—hope it not," she returned; "I should *know* it was not Abdallah, and no speciousness could impose the cheat upon me. Yet could you, by art of necromancy, remove the warrior of the past, and make me see in you the noble Monk-Knight of my love, and him alone, you should not even now be without the price of your great power, or go unrewarded hence to the presence of my lord."

"Ernestina! oh glorious Ernestina! you will destroy me," fiercely uttered Gonzales, while his brow and countenance were strangely serene. "But to my message, incomparable woman. Should I longer tarry to madden on your beauty, not your husband but Abdallah, forced upon you in myself, shall break the seal of widowhood this night."

"Proceed then," said the Lady Ernestina, not quite comprehending him, and in a voice broken by emotion. "The night, as you say, wanes, and fain would I press once again my loving lord to my aching bosom."

"You must know then, lady, that the Baron is here, a sort of truant from the post of honor and of duty. He was severely wounded, and numbered among the slain at the battle of Tiberias, but contrived in the night of that fearful day to creep away unseen by the fatigued and careless watching Saracens. Long he wandered until he met with one, who also had escaped by miracle from that blood-stained field. Soon we learned the fate of Abdallah, who had suffered after his brother knights, by the command of Saladin. Weakened from loss of blood, disheartened, miserable at the death of the friend of his love, and most of all, longing to behold and press once more to his heart his beloved wife, the Baron resolved to avail himself of the report prevailing in the Christian camp that he had been slain, and return to his chateau in Auvergne—there to remain a few days—returning thence to the war in Palestine. To favor his disguise he, too, adopted at my instance the monkish dress. In a word, we reached the neighborhood of the chateau this morning at early dawn, and he despatched me here to apprise you of his coming; the whole must be kept secret from every other human being, the maiden Henriette excepted. He waits for my return, to glad him with the report of your well-being, and to assure him that in utter darkness he will be admitted to your chamber, and there kept concealed until we both set out again for Palestine."

"Oh! glad tidings, even of so brief a joy!" exclaimed the Lady Ernestina with animation. "Quick, my loved husband, to this impatient bosom. Holy Gonzales, if love I cannot yield in sweet return for this, all the warm feeling of a grateful heart at least is yours without reserve," and then she warmly pressed his hand.

"When next we meet, we shall meet in Paradise," returned Gonzales, in a tone that betrayed deep emotion, and yet with unruffled expression of countenance.

"Do holy monks and erring women meet within the mansions of the blest?" queried the Lady Ernestina, half smilingly, as she rose to ring the bell for Henriette to conduct Gonzales out. "I fear me I am too great a sinner in the nature of the love I bear Abdallah to hope for entrance or for mercy there. Holy father, you will pray for me!"

She stood before him, rich in all the loveliness of her perfect grace, the outline of her figure admirably developed by the dress she wore, and the elegance of her contour almost dazzled the sight—her eyes half dimmed with a voluptuous languor, insensibly induced by the nature of her recent conversation with the Monk, seemed to invite to tenderness, while the gentle heaving of her dazzlingly white and rounded bosom told all the deep agitation of her excited soul. Her gaze was fixed upon the face of Gonzales, seemingly as if she would have impressed upon her memory the image of Abdallah, and such became at length the intensity of her regard, that her lips unconsciously parted, disclosing in the act the moist and pearl-like teeth which contrasted ravishingly with the coral of her balmy lips. All this Gonzales embraced at a glance, but most his eye dwelt upon her magnificent hair, the very length and redundancy of which seemed to give her a wickedness of thought, a determination of purpose, which, more than all that host of charms, acted like fire upon his brain. It seemed to him to impart a character, a fixedness of will to her retiring womanhood, that in the very contrast of its strength with all else feminine, subdued the soul with astonishment and surpassing wonder.

"Adored woman," said the Monk, catching her in his firm embrace, and enfolding her warmly to his heart; "I have heard of beauty made to madden and enslave, to stir each wanton pulse to sin, but never could have fancied such transcendent charms as yours. Would that I were Abdallah in Auvergne. Pardon me the bold assertion," he added, "but you will think this night, even in your husband's arms, that Gonzales in the semblance of Abdallah will possess you yet."

"Nay, Sir Monk," she answered with gentle reproach, you impose upon the secret I have revealed to you. Neither such act nor language can become the friend of the noble Baron de Boiscourt. I will not call it insult, for such I know is not intended, but still it is advantage taken of the weakness I have confessed. Do not! do not I entreat you, I implore you! Let me respect my husband's friend!"

"Love, angel, goddess! nay, more than all these! voluptuous soul-se-
ducing and gentle woman," murmured Gonzales, with every pulse beat-

ing violently, and yet with seemingly unexcited manner, "mark well my words; you love me not, because I am not Abdallah, and yet the love of your husband this night shall infuse such passion into your soul, that, ere to-morrow's sun shall set, you will pray my coming to your desiring arms, as even now you pray for your Abdallah. To-morrow you will be mine—not one of all these soul-entrancing beauties, but shall be mine, and, wholly mine. Then come what may, the man you spurn even now shall be pressed to your leaping heart in all the intensity of the love of which you are so capable."

"Nay, hope it not, presumptuous and too confident Monk. Abdallah dead can leave no substitute, however much resembling, for living not himself, the reflection of himself were but a cheating shadow. My noble lord alone is now my all in life."

"I have said it lady, and yet I urge no more to shake the image of Abdallah from the throne it occupies. But another duty waits my poor performance. Even now I go to bring to your chaste arms your noble husband. You will not deem it so, but remember I have said it. The love I bear to you, you shall quickly share."

"Never, never!" she answered with emphasis, "shall the Monk Gonzales find a place within my heart. Surely you do not take the Baroness de Boiscourt for a wanton, that she should change her lover as her glove. If I have felt for Abdallah strong preference, it was the holiness of gratitude for his many services to my noble spouse. It has not been the mere love a woman bears to man, but that of an idolatress to the god of her mind's creation, and yet I have arrayed him in human attributes faultless as your own."

"Then, why not deem me him!" passionately returned Gonzales, as he knelt before her and pressed her robe to his lips. "Not now I ask it, but later, when grief for the lost one shall have grown dull, and the still loved image retains all its undiminished power over your soul."

"Nay, nay, Gonzales, rise; it is in vain you plead your hopeless cause. What of my heart my dear and much-loved lord hath not is buried with Abdallah, and naught shall render me unfaithful to his memory. Yet I think not, Gonzales, that I hate you for the love you bear me, for though a monk, you are still a man, with the strong passions of a man, and she were less than woman who did not glory in the power to merge the former in the latter. Go then, there is my hand—we part in peace, friendship if you will it. Conduct my noble lord. Tell him that Henriette shall in darkness lead him to the well-known nuptial chamber."

"One thing I had forgotten," interrupted the Monk. "He, moreover, wishes, dear lady, that with the dawn no light shall be seen in the chateau—not even to guide him to the bridal bed, nor must a menial know of his return."

"And why this great precaution," asked the Lady Ernestina.

"The mass of curious loiterers, who, seeing lights within the castle at that late hour, might seek to know the cause, and thus mayhap lead to

the knowledge of his presence here, when duty enjoins that he should be in Palestine."

"Tell my dear lord, Gonzales, that his slightest wish shall be obeyed," answered the Baroness. "At the private entrance near the armory Henriette will wait for his approach, and straightway lead him thither. Holy monk, farewell!"

"Heaven and its angels guard you in all happiness!" returned the Monk impressively, imprinting a kiss upon the hand he still retained.

The Lady Ernestina replied not, but taking up the small silver bell, opened the door of the apartment which communicated with the spacious corridor, and rang it gently.

"Henriette, my love," she said, as the sweet girl made her appearance, "conduct the holy father, Gonzales, hence, and use all caution that none of the sleeping household be disturbed. That done, return to me, for I have further need of service, which duly I will impart. Again, holy Monk, I thank you for the tidings you have borne of the health, and safety, and loving impatience of my lord."

Gonzales threw upon her a look of deep meaning, and then having resumed his mask, followed the gentle Henriette, who led him by the hand throughout the darkness, until they had gained the door indicated, near the armory, opening upon the spacious garden.

"Within the hour," said the Monk, as he departed; "he who is to lie within your mistress' arms this night will bear him gladly to this portal unto heaven. Fail not, sweet Henriette, to undo the door and guide him to all happiness.—Good night."

"Henriette, my love," said the Baroness, when the former had again ascended to her room: "what think you was the message brought to me by that holy monk?"

"Nay, lady, he strangely spoke of one who was to lie within your arms this night."

"Even so. You will rejoice with me, Henriette, even when I tell you, my child. My loved lord has returned from Palestine."

"My lord returned! How can this be, dear lady?"

"Impatient with his eager love, he stole away under cover of a report that he had been slain in battle. A few short days he tarries in secrecy, and then returning to the Holy Land, sustained by interchange of mutual love, will join the Christian camp as one just freed from the bondage of the Turk. And now, sweet pet, prepare me for the bridal feast."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AGAIN, and with the same careful hand ascribed to her on a former occasion, did the gentle Henriette perform the pleasing task of unrobing the charms of her beautiful friend and mistress. It has already been shown that she almost idolized the Lady Ernestina. There was a depth of passion in the very act now which had not then been awakened, for the young girl knew, as she gazed upon each chastely swelling and voluptuous beauty, wherefore they were thus unveiled, and what agony of bliss they were to bring to the soul of him to whom they were to be given. Her heart beat with emotion, for the joy of her mistress was her joy.

The same pains were taken to loosen the wavy tresses of her hair, securing their fulness only with a single fold of ribbon, which suffered them to descend in all their gorgeous length. But there was no time now to lose in worship of her glorious perfection. The night waned. She led the glowing Ernestina to the nuptial bed, rejoicing, yet trembling even as when five years before she first had known the charm of wedded and confiding love, and then imprinting on her fragrant lips a kiss that expressed the fulness of her soul, descended to fulfil her mission.

No gleam of light was there within that chamber dedicate to love. All was deepest gloom; and as the Lady Ernestina pressed the snow-white sheets which reposed against her polished limbs, deep thoughts were in her mind, strong images before her eyes. Her bosom heaved with that dear and fond expectancy that ever fills the matron's loving heart, when after long absence she awaits the certain coming of her lord; and her lips half parted, as if she already felt upon them the moistened kiss that sends its deep vibration to the soul. Warm feelings swayed, but not oppressed her frame. They were of so subdued a character that she rather languished under them than felt excitement. Her strange conversation with the monk Gonzales—the boldness of the passion he had expressed to her—his likeness to Abdallah—his confident declaration that he would yet make her love Abdallah in himself—all these things had tended to produce so confused a train of thought, that the only one point on which she could rest with certainty was, that in a few short minutes she would press to her beating heart her long desired lord and husband, and that their new marriage would be consummated.

Steps were now heard cautiously approaching. The heart of the Lady Ernestina beat violently, for she heard the door of the ante-chamber open, and soon the footsteps were on the threshold of her own sanctuary.

"This way, my lord," whispered Henriette; "this is the chamber, and according to your directions, gloomy enough. You may feel the Lady Ernestina even as you have felt me in ascending, but I think I can defy you to see her. Good night, my lord. I shall keep watch until dawn, and then apprise you."

Presently the door of the antechamber was again opened and closed.

What pen shall venture to describe with any thing approaching to fidelity, the warm, the impassioned feelings of a tender and all-confiding woman who, after years of separation, presses once more to her throbbing bosom the adored husband who first awakened there those tender feelings, divest of which her sex were but a name. Not meretricious love can render this—not the cold and hackneyed seemingness of the wanton whom desire would ennoble even in her fall—not the dissembling virtue of the cold and prudent wife, which inspires disgust on the one hand, and on the other chills passion in its bud—neither of these can afford the most remote idea of the truthfulness of desire such as it ought to be—such as it could be made to exist between those of ardent soul, whom the church has united. As there is no pleasure so sweet as that which is enjoyed without remorse, and without a fear, so is there greater rapture to be found in the arms of a wife, whose every thought and wish, however extravagant the promptings of her nature, is her husband's, than in the possession of a host of mistresses, were they multiplied as those of Mahomet himself. But the bond of confidence must exist, gentle as a silken cord, and yet strong as a band of iron—it must unite heart to heart, or it is nothing.

Were the secret of happiness in the wedded state properly understood—were there more liberality on the part of him who arrogantly, but falsely deems himself the first of creation, how different would be the condition of the human race. They who now pine away their lives in regret for the chain they cannot break, and in dread of the bugbear they themselves have raised up, would then only entertain the fear lest some untoward cause should lead to a disunion threatening annihilation to their hopes of happiness for ever. As it is, what are women? Slaves, literally the slaves of men, and regarded principally because they are necessary to their own selfish ends. Few is the number of those, among the millions of the earth, who love woman for herself alone—the perfection of God's will, made manifest in her surpassing beauty, and who are willing to make all sacrifice of self, that not a wish of her soul should remain ungratified. No man better appreciated the worth and excellence of woman than the celebrated poet, who has shown, that nine-tenths of mankind only look upon the sex as like beasts of burden,

"To suckle fools and chronicle small beer."

Never was the sentiment of love more profound, more thrilling in its development than that which now bound the heart of the Lady Ernestina to that of him to whom she had offered up her soul. From the first moment of their being alone, he had whispered an injunction of silence. Her heart was too full, her happiness too complete to desire to waste itself in words; and, therefore, she found it no effort to obey, but while speech was prohibited, the caresses they exchanged told more than speech could the strong excitement of their feelings. Never had the Lady Ernestina been so suffused with tenderness—never had her full heart so glowed with adoration of her husband. The early dawn still

found them fast locked in each other's arms, and, in despite of herself, she broke the silence but in a whisper.

"Loved de Boiscourt," and she pressed him fervently to her heart, "adored husband! Lord of my soul! Oh! grant the prayer of your Ernestina—leave me not again to return to Palestine! Let love, thus sweet renewed, drive from your noble heart all fruitless thought of war. What boots your presence now—Jerusalem is lost? Ah! go not, I pray, to share the fate of him—that dear, that noble Monk-Knight, whom you had taught my heart even more than half to love, that sorrow for his fate alone should be the fruit. Nay, nay, dear lord, overwhelm me not with a double grief. I ill can bear but one. Yet, holy virgin, what means this? You are not my lord. Those features are not his. Ha! traitor, you are the monk Gonzales. By my faith, when my lord arrives he shall know this outrage!"

What a revulsion of feeling. Almost quicker than thought, the love of the Lady Ernestina was succeeded by scorn and indignant hatred. She felt humiliated, crushed even as one who could never rise again.

"Stay, stay one moment, stay! Hear and forgive me," said the Monk, as she struggled to free herself from his embrace. "Oh, hear me! you whom my soul adores—you who have confessed how exceeding is your love for me. If I am not your noble husband, and my much-lamented friend, I am not the more Gonzales. My wife, my matchless wife, whose love is paradise, believe me when I swear that I am Abdallah!"

The Baroness started—she attempted to read his features in the gloom, but in vain. Doubt, uncertainty, agitation, mingled hope and fear, in turn assailed her. Her every sense was tossed even as a bark upon a troubled sea without a helm to guide her. At length she said, with much emotion—

"Nay, then, Gonzales, seek not to guile me with these words, as base as the heart that uses them for its vile purpose. Did you not tell me that you so resembled the noble knight Abdallah that none, the most intimate, could distinguish you?"

"Dearest Lady Ernestina, that I have, for the first time in a life of forty years, employed deceit, I blush to own. It was ignoble, unworthy of my rectitude, and yet the love I bear you was the prompter. I wished to try your feelings for me before I ventured to avow myself—nor this alone. I sought to cheat you into one more embrace in the arms of your beloved lord, and Abdallah's sainted friend. Alas! you weep—you believe me now. That noble hero—that generous-hearted friend lies cold beneath the surface of that soil from which I have returned, forsaking war and the holy church for ever, to supply his place in your exceeding love."

"Ah! can such comfort! such happiness, then be left to me?" exclaimed the Lady Ernestina, sobbing amid the tears that coursed rapidly down her cheeks at the thought of the death of her beloved husband. "Forgive me, if I have done you wrong; but if, indeed, you are Abdallah, which now I scarcely dare to doubt, there is one mark you bear will

dissipate all uncertainty. If you are he who now reigns sole master of my heart, you have a scar upon your left brow, left by a Turkish scimeter, aimed at poor de Boiscourt's life."

"Behold it, my own loved Ernestina," said the Monk, pointing with his left forefinger to a spot just above the eye-brow.

She raised her head, eagerly examined, but could see nothing of the kind. Her renewed tears expressed her disappointment, and yet, strong in the conviction that she was not deceived, she now pillowed her head upon the ample chest of him who had declared himself as having left Palestine for her arms for ever.

"Nay, the day is not sufficiently dawned," returned the Monk, as throwing an arm round her symmetrical and yielding waist, he enfolded her almost fiercely to his throbbing breast.

In a few minutes she looked again. "Ah! I see it now," she exclaimed, flushed and excited by the certainty of her own happiness. "Dear, dear Abdallah! noble Monk whom I have so long loved with a heart-consuming love, how strangely do I feel. Regret, deep sorrow for my dear de Boiscourt, who has, however, long prepared me for the blow. Joy—supreme joy that you are now mine for ever. Poor, lost Alfred. Let us both pray for him—let us consecrate the most generous feelings of our souls to his memory. Yes, Abdallah, if saints are permitted to watch over those they have loved upon this earth, even does he, whom we so lament, watch over and smile upon his Ernestina and Abdallah."

"He does," returned the Monk-Knight, sadly. "The realization of his strong desire that I should press to my maddened heart the cherished object of his love, left pining in her grief, was ever such, that his troubled spirit could not rest in peace unless he witnessed it."

"Ah! Abdallah, how often in imagination have I painted this my union with your noble self. Yes, most holy husband, for such, indeed, I now regard you; how often, in the dead of night, has my lone fancy called up the same image that appeared before me first as the monk Gonzales. I have worshipped and hoped."

"Angel of surpassing beauty! wife of my impassioned soul!" he returned with a calmness of tone strangely in contrast with his glowing words, "bless you for the avowal you have made—hear my own."

"Even such was the fire enkindled in my soul, by the Baron's warm painting of your surpassing tenderness and beauty, that I believe I should have gone mad, had I not been sustained by the half hope, half fear—fear, because it involved the death of my noble friend—that I should yet press to my heart her, for whom it yearned even unto sickness."

The Lady Ernestina replied not, but she pressed him more closely to her heart, and covered his strong chest with kisses from her moist and fragrant lips.

The day had now fairly dawned. The Monk-Knight rested on his elbow, and, raising his hand, gazed on the blue and half-shrinking eyes of the Lady Ernestina, with an expression of such holy benignity and tenderness, that she lay as one fascinated by more than human power.

"It was on the night of the last day of the great battle of Tiberias," he

continued, in the same calm, low tone, "that as I sat a prisoner in the tent which Saladin had assigned to me, I thought of you until every pulse was maddened with hope. Wherever I looked, whichever way I turned, I saw but the vision of yourself, wooing me to your arms. This great state of excitement was to me insupportable, and I groaned in anguish of unexpressed desire to behold you. I had put out my light. It was past the midnight hour, and yet I could not rest; my blood was on fire, for knowing that poor de Boiscourt had fallen, I looked upon you as my wedded wife, whose charms were to my soul as the joys of Paradise. Judge my surprise, when suddenly I saw a light reflected through my own tent from one I had not hitherto noticed, yet which stood but a few paces from me. That light revealed the figure of a woman of perfect symmetry of form, in the act of unrobing. I will not dwell upon particulars. You may suppose that I stopped not to consider if her face corresponded with the perfection of outline of her body. With the exception of her tunic she was now wholly undressed. I stole out of my own tent; I entered hers. She was in the act of extinguishing the light, but I had time enough to see that she was as perfect in feature as she was in form. I caught her in my arms. She was mine. Oh! Ernestina, then, for the first time, my soul knew the nature of the burning love with which it was filled for you, and frantically on her bosom I invoked your name."

"And who was she?" tremblingly and rapturously inquired the Lady Ernestina, while she covered the Monk-Knight's lips with kisses.

"It was my first lesson in God's holy mystery of love," said Abdallah, clenching his teeth at the recollection. "But ah! she whom I possessed was my own sister."

"Your sister!" exclaimed the shuddering Lady Ernestina. Overcome by her emotion, her heart beat tumultuously.

"Yes! my own sister! but there is a step. At another and more fitting moment, love, I will tell you all."

"It is Henriette," murmured the Lady Ernestina. "She comes to apprise you that it is dawn."

"Even so, my lady," returned the girl, the shadow of whose figure now obscured the doorway. "The day, my lord, is breaking fast, and I am here to take your orders."

"Rather take my orders," said the Lady Ernestina, rallying; "come hither, child."

"What, my Lady and my Lord not risen! Fie, fie! I should die with shame."

"Rather would you die of sorrow, were it otherwise," playfully returned her mistress. "Come closer, dear."

"Oh! dear me, what will become of us! Not my noble master—not the Lord de Boiscourt, but that handsome monk that so flurried me yesterday. Nay, nay, my Lady, how could you be so wicked?"

"Wicked—child!" said the blushing Lady Ernestina; "call you it wicked to spread the nuptial feast before the husband of our love? Alas! Henriette, poor Alfred has been dead many months: he has fallen in Palestine. This, sweetest, is Abdallah, him of whom we nightly spoke."

Henriette turned pale, felt sick at heart, and burst into a paroxysm of tears, for, in truth, she loved the noble and generous-hearted de Boiscourt.

"Nay, my poor Henriette, weep on. I could weep too, but my heart is so full of other thoughts and other feelings, that I have not time to weep. Sorrow is checked by joy. When we are alone, and apart from this exceeding happiness, we will mingle streams of tears together; and now, dear Henriette," she continued, enfolding the sweet girl to her heart, "you must prepare the morning meal even with your own hands, in the small room that adjoins the confessional. There we shall be safe from all interruption. What seems mysterious to you, I will explain later. At present, in everything but form, I am again a loving wife, but it must not be known in the chateau that the holy father, the second husband of my adoration, has lain within these arms, until the Church hath set its seal upon our mutual love."

"Sweet Lady, you shall be obeyed," said Henriette, seized with sudden passion at her noble mistress's happiness, and pressing her bosom fondly to her own. "The meal shall be prepared, even as you desire, in secrecy and abundance—succulent food and rare wines will best comport with your appetites I take it, and these shall not be wanting"—and waving her hand gracefully to Abdallah she withdrew."

"You forgot, adored Ernestina," said the Monk, when they were alone, and in a calm, yet rich and thrilling tone, "that only yet you have possessed de Boiscourt, but now that the darkness favors not the cheat—now that the soft blush of day enables the fascinated eye to gaze upon that surpassing beauty which has hitherto been rather imagined than known, be in all the sweet abandon of your glowing soul, my wife—not the noble and high-minded de Boiscourt's wife—but the wife of Abdallah—of him—the holy monk, whose chastity, with only one exception, has never known a woman but yourself."

"Oh God! my husband," murmured the Baroness, as their hearts throbbed audibly against each other, "your Ernestina—your fond, your devoted wife is yours, and yours alone for ever."

When, two hours later, the Lady Ernestina took her seat at the breakfast-table in the elegant *robe-de-chambre*, in which the provoking Henriette, deeply sympathizing in her joy, had only half shadowed her beauty, she was very pale—two small spots of hectic alone being visible on her cheeks, while her long dreamy and languishing eyes were only half seen below the drooping lids. The Monk-Knight, on whose arm she entered the room, and who wore a large crucifix of iron suspended from his neck, was pale also, but nothing could exceed the dignity and imposing grace of his carriage, while on his noble brow could be seen traced, as with the impress of a divine power, that mingled expression of calm benevolence, goodness, gentleness, and absence of excitement, for which his features always were so remarkable.

Henriette—the dark-haired, and usually pensive Henriette—who presided at the breakfast-table, declared with a significant smile, that they both looked fatigued as two penitents who had passed the night in the adjoining confessional; and while pouring out a cup of coffee for her mistress, strongly recommended to the Monk-Knight a goblet of the best old Burgundy within

the chateau, a bottle of which she had taken care to provide, and which was there sparkling before them.

But the Monk-Knight and the Lady Ernestina were so absorbed in their passion for each other, their earnest gaze so devoured the soul that lingered in the eyes of each, that it was long before either could be made sensible, through the grosser appetite of their nature, that they really required the nourishment the gentle and considerate Henriette sought to force upon them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Who shall say, that where there is true love, possession ever palls upon the appetite, or that passion, originally strong, is not increased by intimacy with its object? No; the superficial in feeling—the weak in intellect—the mere impulsive animal may feel thus—but the educated, the refined, the delicate, the loving man clings to the wife of his adoration, as a devotee clings to his saint. She is, as it were, his god—his divinity—the being to whom he offers up the idolatry of his soul. He lives only in her, and for her. His heart softens, his eyes overflow with tenderness. A slave only to the burning desire he entertains, to devise new and unheard-of pleasures for her whom he adores, he racks his memory and imagination to invent them. He kneels at the feet of her he loves—he feels that it is a duty which he owes not only to herself but to his God, to cherish and protect her weakness. In his eyes she is without a fault: her feebleness, her delicacy, are what compose her strength. She is to him a thing so lovely, so perfect, that she scarcely seems to him formed of the same gross material with himself. He can only wonder that the great God of the universe should have condescended to bestow upon him one who might be deemed more fitted to consort with angels.

Such are the feelings of the man who sincerely loves. True, it must be the love of the educated and strong in mind for the beautiful; but it is to be assumed that all women capable of inspiring love as a mystery, are beautiful. In such event it is unfair, unjust, to charge the nature of man with inconstancy. Not woman herself is more devoted or more true, and so far from proving faithless to her who is really gifted with Circean yet intellectual power to enchain the soul, he thinks, and acts, and feels as if there was no other object in the creation but the enchanting, the beautiful, the soul-seducing partner of his happiness.

Thus it was with Abdallah and the Lady Ernestina. With each succeeding day, their passion grew more intense from fruition. They had been privately married on the evening of the day following that of Abdallah's arrival from Palestine, the rites having been performed in the confessional of the chateau, and by the venerable Bishop of Clermont. The very act of marriage had increased the passionate character of their attachment. They were seldom asunder—the same air—the same presence was necessary to

them both, so much so, that the tender Henriette, with heavy heart and tearful eye, complained to the mistress she adored, scarcely less than the Monk-Knight did, that she no longer now noticed, or seemed to return her affection. The Baroness covered her with caresses, promised to devote more time to her young favorite, but the power of Abdallah over her soul was too great—the pledge was ever broken.

Six months had passed in this manner; the whole neighborhood of the chateau regarded as something marvellous the daily-increasing attachment of the Lady Ernestina for the majestic and powerful Monk, who, it was whispered, was still a member of the Holy Church. Some even went so far as to assert that he had had dealings with Satan while in the land of the Infidel, and had brought with him a charm which had exercised such power over her heart, that she had literally become his slave, having no joy but in his presence, and the contemplation of features, to which had been given by the Evil One, a power of fascination, that no woman could withstand. How else, they argued, could one so young—so retiring in her manner—nay, so noted for her strict morality and attention to religious observances, espouse a renegade from the purity of the Church, and withal, of an age so much more mature than her own. All agreed that their constancy, their devotion to each other was the result of some hidden influence of a superhuman kind; for amid the general looseness of manner of the times, strong attachments of this nature were looked upon rather as spells, than as principles of right implanted in the human heart.

Six months had passed. The exciting fulness of the Lady Ernestina's round figure became yet fuller still. She carried proudly beneath her heart the fruit of the strong love she bore to the Monk-Knight, who still retained his name, while she was yet known and addressed as the Baroness de Bois-court. It had been a mutual arrangement between themselves, the better to provoke the keenness of their excitement. Both loved the unseen child; not because they believed it to be their own, but because each ascribed it to the other.

It was a beautiful evening in spring. The trees had put on their summer foliage. The meadows were green and redolent with sweetness. The air was balmy—the sky serene, and the forest around them, alive with notes of many birds telling their mutual tale of love. The Monk-Knight and his adored Lady Ernestina, his heaven-bestowed wife, sat upon the shaded margin of the brook which meandered through the grounds, and to the surface of which many varicolored fishes rose in pursuit of the fly, that, unconscious of its danger, skimmed the surface—thus breaking its mirror-like smoothness, and covering it with innumerable circular ripples. They sat beneath an expansive oak, which threw its shadow far around, and tempered the warm atmosphere with its vastness. The sloping bank on which they sat was covered with sweet verdure even to the water's edge.

The left arm of Abdallah was thrown around the waist of his beloved. Her left hand was in his right. Their gaze was mutually fixed on each other—their hearts throbbed—their breathing was deep—their love was stronger far than in the first days of the union.

"Mother of my child—oh, what a world of deep and divine thought is

comprised in those few words"—murmured the Monk-Knight, calmly, yet with marked intonation, as he raised his fascinating glance from her swelling form to the long lashed blue eye, that now fired and now dissolved in tenderness beneath his gaze. "Can this be real, or have I dreamed it all! Can it be possible that you indeed are mine—that I have, in truth, drank into my full soul the intoxication of your more than earthly beauty—that beauty, which in my hours of solitude in Palestine, appeared to me afar off as an emanation from God—unapproachable in its gorgeousness! and its loveliness! Oh! this is too much. I shall die. I feel myself sinking beneath this mighty weight of happiness.—Possession does not satisfy me—it maddens; but the desire remains stronger than ever. I drink of the overflowing cup, but my thirst is never quenched. The more I taste of the sweet joys which emanate from my heaven-born wife, the more self-annihilating are my desires for them. Ah! holy and adored one, my love for you is destroying me,"—and he wept.

"Abdallah, dear and superhuman Abdallah—my lord, my life, my husband—even as you feel, so does your Ernestina feel. Touch there," she continued, wildly, as she placed his hand upon her throbbing bosom—the madness of love seeking love is there also. Yes, not even the devoted ardor of your great affection ever can quench the fire that rages in this bosom for you, and you alone. I would be a part of yourself, identified, infused into the holy father of my child, and because I cannot reach this keen acme of my happiness, that happiness is incomplete." She threw her arms around his muscular neck, and joined her tears to his.

Ah, with what madness each pressed the other to the bounding, aching heart. Ardent as was their love, so was their embrace. The Lady Ernestina glued her lips to his—she inhaled his breath. Her eye, usually so soft in expression, looked into his with a wild fire, which carried intensest tumult to the Monk-Knight's heart. One glance at the swelling shape that overwhelmed his soul with unutterable thought, and again the beautiful and sobbing Ernestina was all his own. Such love as theirs could only come from God.

So full was the intoxication of their souls—so absorbing was their mutual love, that they heard not the rustling of the leaves and the twigs of the forest, which, extending to the margin of the brook, afforded them its temporary shelter, until a piercing cry from the lips of the Lady Ernestina, and a sense of sharp and sudden pain from Abdallah, told them they were not alone. Quickly the Monk-Knight sprang to his feet, and confronted a man wearing a pilgrim's dress, of Moorish complexion, who had evidently aimed the blow just received, for he held tightly grasped in his hand a poignard, which was red and dripping with blood. Uttering a piercing scream the Lady Ernestina rose also, and with bared bosom and disordered hair, threw herself between the Monk-Knight and his assailant, clasping and uplifting her hands at the same time, and praying the latter to take her life, if he so wished, but to spare that of him who was dearer to her soul than heaven.

The stranger gazed long and anxiously upon that interposing form. He seemed altogether to have lost sight of his victim in the contemplation of the singular attitude of the lady, for at each moment her agitation became

greater ; and well was the appearance of the Baroness calculated to attract attention. Her hair loosely floated over her shoulders—her cheek was flushed—her eye full of excitement—her manner wild with alarmed love. These, with the full exposure of her white blue veined and swelling bosom, and the commanding character given to her half-matured pregnancy, formed a whole well calculated to arrest the eye and absorb the senses.

"Ha!" he observed, in a smothered voice, which the Baroness thought sounded familiar to her ear, "you pray for your paramour, and he indeed were a devil who could refuse you." Then falling on one knee, and raising his clasped hands, he added, "I have seen all, heard all, and the desire of my own soul for you has infused the pangs of madness into my veins. To possess you is to inherit eternal happiness. That happiness shall be mine—ay, look not indignant—I repeat, it shall be mine. The child of him whom I would have slain, but spare for your sake, may be at your heart, but not the less shall you be mine. I go; the hour of my own triumph is not yet come: yet expect me."

And rising and casting a look of intense hatred upon Abdallah, who, strange to say, attempted not to interfere with, or follow in pursuit of, the assassin, he quickly disappeared in the forest from which he had emerged.

The first impulse of the Monk and the Lady Ernestina, when left alone, was to rush into each other's arms. Their souls were filled to overflowing with renewed thanks to Providence that the blow had not been a mortal one, and that a better feeling had come over the heart of him who had not repeated it. The joy of the Baroness was the most unmixed with apprehension for the future because there was less apparent cause. She mocked at the wild threat of the stranger, even as she had lightly treated that of Gonzales, and considered it but an idle taunt, springing from disappointment—in whom she was wholly at a loss to divine. Her concern now was for the condition of the Monk-Knight, whose wound she straightway examined. The poignard had passed even up to the hilt through the fleshy part of the body under the shoulder, but the ribs had only been slightly grazed. A good deal of blood had followed the withdrawal of the weapon, and the linen of the Monk was saturated. Pale and anxious, even while sensible that there was no ground for serious alarm, the Lady Ernestina insisted on his having the wound instantly dressed by her own hands, and accordingly to her boudoir they slowly walked, filled with deeper passion for each other than any they had yet entertained.

Painful thoughts—staggering doubts, were mixed up in the heart of the Monk-Knight, as he pondered on the scene that had just occurred. The wound inflicted upon him affected him not. He was rather glad that, being so imperfectly done as to fail in tearing him for ever from the arms of his beloved, it had been done. At a single blow of his giant arm he could have struck his assailant lifeless to the ground, despite of the weapon which he held dripping with his blood, and such was the course he had first meditated: but as he keenly glanced into the eye of him, who in his turn seemed fascinated by the beauty of his wife, his purpose was changed almost as soon as formed, for through his disguise he knew the man—one long known to him, and a hair of whose head he would not have injured even to save his own life. For

the first time since his union, Abdallah was ill at ease. The first bitter had been infused into his cup of happiness. One secret he had which he dared not reveal to her who in all others possessed his heart's undivided and entire confidence. The necessity for concealment rendered him unhappy, for it ill suited with that expansion of the soul which made the mutual interchange of thought nearly as rapid as thought itself.

Such were the feelings of Abdallah on entering the chateau, but so far from causing any abatement in his intense passion for his enchanting wife, it only rendered him the more keenly susceptible of its influence. Hitherto there had been no fear, no apprehension of his losing her, but on that score he now felt not the same security which the Lady Ernestina had expressed. There was a possibility, and that possibility tore his heart with agony. Had she whom he so passionately, so madly loved, lain cold at his side, it would have been joy to him to have embraced a death, which would have placed their bodies even in the tomb near each other; but to know that she lived, and apart from him, would have been torture of the deepest kind. To die was nothing, when her love was wanting to give value to life. To live, and live apart from her, whose soul was the fountain of enduring love, and whose frame was fashioned to speak more warmly than words can tell the sweet abandonment of desire, were to entail the loss of reason and the death of joy. Never had he believed it possible that woman could obtain such exclusive worship from the soul of man—never had he so rejoiced that God had blessed him by emancipating his mind from bondage, and bestowing upon him that true knowledge of human happiness which he had acquired by his marriage with the Lady Ernestina.

"Who, lord of my heart, could have been your cruel and unprovoked assailant?" tenderly inquired the Lady Ernestina, as she proceeded to remove the blood, and apply emollients to the wounded side. "I should have deemed that one like you could have had no enemy in life—that even the tiger and the panther, so far from seeking to injure would have crouched unharmed at the aspect of that noble and benignant countenance."

"I know not," said the Knight-Monk, enfolding her to his heart. "True, I had no enemy on earth—none, surely, have I willingly offended, thus to do me wrong."

The reply was correct as to fact, but it was evasive. Abdallah felt it to be such, and he was humiliated in his own eyes. It was only the consciousness that he had spoken thus to give balm to the idol of his soul, that at all justified him to himself.

"God grant that no evil befall you," sighed the Lady Ernestina. "As for myself, fear not. No, holy Monk-Knight, if beauty, indeed, be mine, as your great partiality so deems, that beauty shall be yours alone. The stranger mentioned that I should yet be his. Again, fear it not. I never had the courageous soul to dare, yet before another wantons in these charms, which love holds consecrate to you, the father of the child which fills me with a mother's pride, I have a remedy will preserve my faith."

"Nay, nay, my noble Ernestina," he said calmly, yet pressing her warmly to his heart, "fear not so rude a trial. Shall I not be for ever near to guard

the precious casket of my lavish love, from aught that could sully or defame the polished mirror of its beauty? Alas, there is but one—"

"One, said you, Abdallah? What one? Who shall hope to wed with Ernestina, who acknowledges but one absorbing love to overwhelm her soul? No, pardon me, shade of my departed Alfred, but too faithfully have you done your glorious work. Hear me, Abdallah," she pursued tightly grasping his hand, "were it possible that de Boiscourt should rise from the dead and woo me to his love again, I should reject him. I could not commit the loathsome infidelity. My very soul revolts at the thought, and yet deeply do I still regard him. No act of mine," and as she spoke, a voluptuous languor dimmed her closing eye, "shall ever give token of my soul's most deep delight, but that in madness shared with the father of my child—the first of men, the favorite of Heaven."

"How, how," murmured the Monk-Knight, looking all his soul through his mild eyes—"how shall I repay this great devotion of your love?"

"Oh! I am repaid already," she answered, with a winning and a meaning smile. "You are with me, and I am happy—safe from the assassin's knife—I ask no more—since that I cannot enter into your being, and nestle ever near your heart."

"That happiness be mine, sweet wife," said the Monk, eagerly. "Ever blessed be that heart that, all confiding and impatient, now opens its mine of richest treasure to receive me."

"Yours, for ever yours," she faintly sighed. "Ah! Abdallah, dear Abdallah—mighty lord of your Ernestina's glowing soul, do with your adoring slave even as you will."

CHAPTER XXV.

A fortnight had elapsed since the attempt to assassinate Abdallah, and yet nothing had transpired to throw farther light on the mystery. The superficial wound was soon closed, and all fear of the future had been utterly banished from the mind of the Lady Ernestina. Abdallah thought much, but said nothing on the subject. Meanwhile the cup of love was overflowing to the brim. If possible, the intensity of the passion which consumed them, even in the fulness of its gratification, was increased. For hours they would linger in each other's arms, gazing away their souls through their eyes, and looking thoughts, that in keenness of happiness are rarely indeed entertained by the human heart, and which scorched up the blood in their veins. Then, when their feelings were strung to the highest pitch of admiration and love for each other, and when the half fierce, half humid eye expressed the inextinguishable fever of their souls, what human pen shall paint the delicious tumult of those heaven-bestowed raptures which blended them in one mystic identity, and drew from their trembling lips thanks of gratitude to the beneficent God of all nature, for having given them power and the will so to appreciate his blessings.

Oh! how they loved each other; that noble and powerful Monk-Knight, whose strength had never been wasted by intemperance, and the gentle, the delicate, and the gracefully yielding Lady Ernestina. Even as the fair snow-white, and drooping lily clings to, and breathes its sweet upon the vine-covered trunk of the tall, dark, gnarled and majestic oak, so was the fragrance of the caressing and intertwining wife emitted in sweet abundance on the strong and muscular trunk of the husband she loved. If angels had sought the most radiant, the most perfect picture of happiness upon earth, that which the most reminded them of the power and wisdom and goodness of God, they would have found it here; for neither man nor angel, in the fullest power of his imagination, could have conceived anything more illustrative of the ineffable love of God himself, than was afforded by the sight of this strong man and delicate woman, wrapt up in the intensity of their refined feelings for each other.

Their passion had now become so boundless—so completely were their senses steeped in the all-absorbing love, which placed no limit to its indulgence, that their appetites failed them, and the common rest of wearied nature was denied to them. One only thought, one only image, one only desire, filled their souls—it was that of the unceasing interchange of their mutual and quenchless affection, which circulated keenly, exquisitely, stinging through their veins, and produced an excitement that never slumbered.

One beautiful morning, after having partaken of a slight breakfast, they sauntered into the adjacent grounds and forest, passing through the garden, perfumed with the scent of innumerable choice flowers on their way to them. One arm of Abdallah was thrown around the pliant waist of the Lady Ernestina, while his right hand was lowered at intervals to pluck an offering for his beloved. At the farthest extremity of the ground, and just within the skirt of the forest, near the spot where Abdallah had received his wound, was a small trellised arbor, which commanded a view of the chateau, and its open domain. Perceiving that she was rather fatigued with her walk, which, although not very long, had been more than sufficiently so for one in her present condition, the Monk-Knight insisted upon her entering and seating herself.

The interior of the arbor was fitted up with every regard to luxurious repose. It was hemmed in on every side by trees whose foliage emitted a fragrant and delicious odor, which was wafted at each undulation of the branches, and formed a sanctuary devoted to those who loved to luxuriate in the song of the birds that peopled the forest without, or to watch and listen to the murmured rippling of the small stream, which, it has already been shown, meandered through the grounds, and was occasionally seen from the summer-house as the sun's rays danced over its silvery surface. The floor was covered over with the same matting that ornamented the bed-chamber; while easy chairs, and *chaises longues*, and a couple of small sofas, or rather settees, very narrow and elastic, composed the chief part of the furniture. A few rudely printed books, chiefly works on theology, and the events which had been enacted in Palestine, filled the shelves of a beautifully-carved cabinet of black ivory, the lower part of which contained liqueurs, and wines, and various descriptions of cakes.

Hand in hand Abdallah and the Lady Ernestina sat on one of these low sofas, drinking into their souls deep draughts of love from each other's eyes, and embalming their souls in the overflowing passion that consumed them. Soon footsteps were heard approaching the summer-house, and Abdallah rose to ascertain who thus intruded on their privacy. It was one of the domestics of the chateau, who had come to announce, on the report of the messenger who had galloped over, a desire on the part of the Bishop of Clermont, that he should come to him immediately, on a point of the utmost importance. The emergency seeming so great, the Monk-Knight took a tender leave of his beloved wife, whom he recommended to rest, until Henriette, whom he promised to despatch as soon as he reached the chateau, should have time to join her.

Left to herself the Lady Ernestina had gradually fallen into a refreshing slumber, when, suddenly aroused by the opening of the door, she looked up, and to her horror and astonishment, beheld the very man who had so recently assaulted her husband. With an air of impatience he closed and bolted the door, and then advancing to the sofa, on which she sat, threw himself upon his knees at her feet, and embraced her waist.

The first act of the Baroness was to call out with affright; the next, to push with all her strength from her the daring intruder. This was no difficult task; for no sooner did he perceive the look of loathing with which he was regarded, than he drew back from the pressure of her hands, and covered his face with his palms.

"And is it so, then, Ernestina?" he said, in tones of deep affliction and sadness, and in a voice too familiar not to be recognized now; "is what the whole of Auvergne asserts so true? Is your devotion to this Monk-Knight Abdallah, whom my soul sickens ever to have known, so great that you have not eyes to penetrate this poor disguise—to recognize the once deep object of your love—him who has so adored you; who even now so adores you—bearing even as you do the fruit of adulterous love?" and he glanced meaningfully at her altered figure."

But the Lady Ernestina heard him not to the end. From the outset of his address she had fainted; for, even as Abdallah had on a former occasion, she had now fully penetrated the disguise of his dark-stained features, and found fullest confirmation in the rich, sweet tones of his voice. Awhile de Boiscourt gazed fondly upon her, and he almost wished her dead, but the feeling was transient. Other thoughts were in his soul, and had that momentary and vague wish been realized, the next minute would he have been a corpse at her side. He chafed her temples from a bottle of perfume that lay upon an adjoining mosaic table—he rubbed her hands—he called her frantically his beloved wife—his own Ernestina, and swore eternal worship and devotion to her every wish.

There was no marked emotion of joy or sorrow, or even of surprise, when, at length recovering from the shock she had sustained, the Lady Ernestina calmly remarked, as she allowed him to take her passive hand, "How is this, de Boiscourt, they told me you were dead!"

"Even so it was thought," he replied, deeply wounded at the coldness of her manner. "I lay on the field of Tiberias among the slain, but a

guardian angel, in the form of an Infidel maiden, while roaming the field that night for plunder to support a hungry and dying father, saw me—suckled me—led me thence, and took me to her bosom, lavish with much love. A month I tarried in the tent apart from the camp of Saladin, in which she lived alone with the father who died on the next day after my arrival. I wished not life: my whole desire was death to ensure your happiness with Abdallah. But Heaven willed it not: I was doomed to live.”

“Ha!” exclaimed the Baroness, eagerly interrupting him; “you say you sought my happiness with Abdallah, and yet you came to slay him even in my arms—him who is dearer to my soul than life—whose minion, slave, I am in love, and ever shall remain.”

“Ernestina, oh Ernestina, is it even so?”

“Yes, de Boiscourt, once master of this full heart, it is so; and my deepest blessing on you for having made it so. Our love for five long years was innocent and mild. Such it would have continued, had not yourself awakened in my soul such sweet yet strong desire for your more than mortal friend.”

“Friend!” groaned the Baron, in agony of spirit; “call him your own paramour; “but no, no, I rave: he is still my friend; the lover of my wife. He shall be all, everything to her.”

“He shall!” said the Lady Ernestina, with marked emphasis. “But hear me, de Boiscourt!” she slowly whispered, with features set in intensity of excitement—“so well, in so masterly a manner did you instil the delicious poison into my soul, that often, in the dead of night, panting, shrieking, adoring in Henriette’s confiding arms, have I lain, cheating myself into the wild belief that I held the herculean Monk-Knight, whose great goodness you so truthfully painted, to my bounding bosom, and gazed my soul out through my eyes dissolved in his. Even as you wished—implored me—so I acted.”

“And is it possible,” exclaimed the unhappy de Boiscourt, “that I have done all this?”

“All, all!” replied the Lady Ernestina. “Ah, repent it not, de Boiscourt; a hundred years of life will ill suffice to pay in gratitude my soul’s deep thankfulness for the consuming bliss you have bestowed upon me. Yet wherefore is it,” she continued, resuming her original coldness of manner, “that you sought the life of him you gave me with your own free will? In slaying him you would have slain me—slain his child! Yes, de Boiscourt—his child! Oh, think of that. There is madness in it.”

“Are my senses leaving me?” groaned the now wretched, once gay and generous Knight. “Oh, God! this is too much. I had not thought of or looked for this.”

“Then why, if so careful of my happiness,” resumed the Baroness, “did you seek to tear from my wildly clinging heart the only born of woman who can yield me happiness?—ay, de Boiscourt,” and she convulsively grasped his arm while she looked coldly in his face—“him, that more than man, who is slowly killing me with his intensity? Wherefore this, I ask!—why deny me the death I crave myself?”

De Boiscourt sprang to his feet. He paced the small room hurriedly—

madly, and yet with an expression of deep agony, while large drops of sweat stood forth from his handsome though discolored brow.

"Ah, that I had died in honor upon that field of blood, knowing not the hands I loved so soon would aim this dreadful blow. Heart, heart, foolish heart—break, or be still! Yes, then had I been spared a torture worse than death: and yet," he added, more composedly, "even what you would say is true. I have dug the grave of my own happiness. Yet hear me, beloved wife, adored Ernestina—yes, still adored, still beloved, even were your heart a thousandfold wedded to the manly virtues of Abdallah. What now I speak is true as Holy Writ. When I wrote to you as I did, it was my strong desire that the Monk-Knight should revel in your matchless beauty if that I fell in Palestine, for well I knew such love as that you now avow would fire your heart to madness. He himself can tell how much I wished it. But ah! I had not meant this, my life, preserved by Heaven. That life I could have surrendered up to God who gave it, but never could I resign my right to you while hope remained to me. When cured of my wounds," he resumed, after a pause, "the Saracen maiden, while weeping tears at my departure from my low concealment, led me on to Antioch, which I reached in restored health and safety from the enemy. At Antioch I tarried many months, not knowing that Abdallah had left his brother knights, and hastened on to France. At length a rumor reached the good king Louis, whose lovely consort—the majestic and graceful Elenora—had at my first arrival sought and won me to her love; that of all the knights who had fallen into the hands of Saladin at our great defeat, one only, Abdallah, the Monk-Knight, had been suffered to live, and, forsaking the cowl, had departed for the West."

"What my feelings were," pursued the Baron, "you well may understand. I felt that I had ruined myself by delay, and yet, although painfully assured it was too late, instantly started in this poor disguise, breaking, without regret, the spell which the really loving Eleanora had thrown around my senses. As I journeyed, I thought unceasingly of you and of Abdallah. I saw him—your husband—enjoying all a husband's rights in your yielding arms, and my soul was filled —"

"With hatred," half sneeringly, interrupted Lady Ernestina; "Generous man."

"No, not with hatred. I could not *then* hate the man I once had loved. I could not hate him of whose great passion I felt assured already you had tasted, and on whom you had sweetly lavished all your own. Hear me, Ernestina," he concluded, seizing her hand and tenderly pressing it to his lips—"the longer I journeyed, the nearer I approached Auvergne; my regret at my delay was turned into rejoicing; my love for you both—my desire to see you both happy, was as great as it had been when I intended that my certain death should be the condition of your union. All I desired was to be spared to be a second in that love, of which I had so recently been the sole possessor."

"Indeed," said the Lady Ernestina, with sarcasm; "and so, in order to be that second, you had nearly destroyed the first. This, it appears to me,

is somewhat contradictory. Perhaps the Baron de Boiscourt will be good enough to explain."

There was a coolness, a calmness, a severity of satire in the manner in which the usually gentle Baroness expressed herself, that caused the unhappy Knight to gaze upon her with rising tears, and with deep sorrow at his heart.

"These," he resumed, while a slight frown gathered on his brow, "were my feelings on entering Auvergne, which I did on the night previous to my rash attempt upon the life of Abdallah. No sooner had I entered Clermont, when, although known to no one in my true character and name, my ears rang with titterings and gibings, and wild reports of the strange love that had come over the heart of the lovely Baroness de Boiscourt for the great Monk-Knight, who had mysteriously and suddenly appeared from Palestine—no one knew how—and whom she had married on the day following that which brought to her the intelligence of her husband's death. This," continued de Boiscourt, "I confess, annoyed and mortified me, not because it was so, but because the prying vulgar should have been afforded the opportunity of saying it was so. Still your fair fame was even dearer to me than your own. Heaven knows that I would, with my own hands, have filled your cup of happiness to the brim, but I would have had no other to know it but our own mystic triunion. Again I repented me of my long delay, for had I arrived before Abdallah—in time to prevent the publicity of the private marriage, then I should still," he whispered, in conclusion, "have been your husband,—Abdallah, the chief lord of your changing soul, the wild and most deserved reveller in the beauty I had taught him to adore, even as he now does."

The glow which suddenly animated the speaking features of the handsome and imaginative Knight, and which was strongly visible even beneath the deep dye of his disguise, as he then expressed himself, called up corresponding feelings in the heart, and a hectic tinge on the cheek of the Lady Ernestina.

"Had you done this, de Boiscourt," she said emphatically, and speaking for the first time, with animation, "had you preceded Abdallah to the nuptial bed, and taught my heart by slow experience the value of the love you had provided for me, this could and should have been. Then duty as a wife had been observed, and love for both alternate swayed my soul."

"And why not now, my Ernestina? Wherefore the change?" and again kneeling at her feet, he seized and pressed her hands in his.

"Hear me, de Boiscourt," she returned, calmly. "When first Abdallah ravished my full soul with his exceeding love, it was in the dead of night. He came to me as you. He filled my imagination with you. Never had I loved you so deeply, so fervently. My wantonness found speech. I breathed into his ear, thinking it was you I addressed, every tender and sweetly voluptuous word which you so well had taught me; and, oh! the effect. Methought some Eastern sorcerer had sold for gold some priceless love potion, a present for your Ernestina. That then I loved you is most true, seeing that then I held you with unabated warmth to my desiring soul. Morning dawned; its beams fell upon a Christ-like countenance—sweet, holy,

calm, benignant. It was Abdallah; who, great and generous to your memory—for he believed you dead—had sought to fill once more the bosom of your wife with sighs of rapture for yourself alone. The change was instant. All my preceding love for you perished in its bloom. I could not even shed a tear at his recital of your fall upon that bloody field. Nay, shall I confess? I rather joyed than sorrowed at a fate that kept me wholly for the strange wild love, with which, new to my soul, that holy father had loved me—with which, even now, he loves. You see then, de Boiscourt, how stands my heart. I could not be false to him even if my sense inclined. I love him with a holy love, which would kill me with despair, as after memory of guilt with you reproached me with the profanation."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DE BOISCOURT had listened with the most intense interest to the exciting confession of her, who despite of the report of his own death, and her consequent marriage with the Monk-Knight, he still regarded as his wife. More tenderly than ever he loved her. More fiercely he desired to possess her. Her very situation added to his passion.

"Be your soul Abdallah's,"—he said imploringly—"love him as you will—make him lord and master of your desires—but oh! Ernestina, surely you will not forever close the door of paradise against him who has so often sipped of its sweets, and worshipped and adored all that is within. How have I sinned against yourself that I should be thus treated and expelled from the heaven I once inhabited? Let me but share your love with the holy father of your child, and I shall be content."

The bosom of the Lady Ernestina rose and fell perceptibly; her cheek was flushed with the wild ideas called up by his language; her dimmed and half-closed eye told all the excitement of her soul.

"Hear me," pursued de Boiscourt, perceiving that she was moved; "no one knows of my arrival as the lord of these domains. Nothing therefore so simple as to sink my name and title, and leave Abdallah in undisturbed possession as your lawful husband, rendered such by my decease. I will pass as a member of your household, in some capacity exempt from base, dishonouring toil. Oh! beloved one, consent to this, and my love for you will not be more powerful than my increased friendship for Abdallah."

"Friendship for Abdallah!" said the Baroness, once more resuming her coldness and forbiddingness of manner. "Ah! I had forgotten. You have not stated why, with that exceeding love for him and me, you sought his life. Will the Baron de Boiscourt be good enough to explain, as briefly as he can, the curious association of love and hate?"

"I have already stated," returned the young Knight, again much discouraged by her satire, "that I approached with sentiments of love for you both. Alas! I came by the summer-house; hearing voices I stopped,

for they sounded familiarly to my ear. I looked through the trees, and beheld—ah! what a sight!—I stood transfixed with such confused feelings, as never yet had entered in my breast. Then first the fiend of jealousy, like the lightning's flash, entered in my soul. I could have killed you both, even as you were, so sudden was my hate; and yet I checked the impulse, but when after pressing your balmy lips with wildest ardor to his own, and leaving there the deep impress of their sweets, you whispered loud enough for me to hear these words, which ever fired the languid channel of our veins, and which, when murmured by yourself, proclaim the absence of all restraining thought—when to this was added the sight of your gracefully-swelling form—my jealousy attained such pitch, that I, who had come to greet and love him, now thirsted for his blood with the bitterness of hate. Hence, the blow I struck him, even in the fulness of his transcendent passion. It was a momentary madness which induced the act. Bitterly have I since repented it."

"It was the result of your first knowledge of the difference which exists between theory and practice," said the Lady Ernestina calmly, when she had heard all.

The Baron was deeply mortified. For a moment or two, he covered his eyes with his palms. At length he remarked, in a voice in which chagrin and disappointment were blended:

"Ernestina, what I have done in regard to myself, I repent not; I only regret the outrage committed against Abdallah."

"Upon him," said the Lady Ernestine slowly, and with sarcasm; who has, I believe, preserved *your* life, at least at various times."

"True, there was a period when you regarded this in a rather different light," said the Baron, with profound sorrow in his tone.

"There was—I loved you then. Now, I scarcely know that I regard you. You have altered the whole current of my life and thoughts. I am no longer the wife of a mortal—I have exchanged him who was my husband for one who is only second to a god. His slave I am, body and soul, for ever."

For some minutes the Baron felt too disheartened to speak. At length he said, in an ill-assured voice—"But Ernestina, you will not refuse my proposal: you will not reject my offer? Abdallah shall be your husband still—the master of this wide domain, if I but share your love with him. Recollect, I asked not the same extent of love. That, you say, is wholly his. Hear me, then, dearest. If you assent, in no way shall I act to set aside your unlawful marriage with Abdallah, nor will it be known to any besides ourselves, that de Boiscourt yet lives. The Monk-Knight may esteem me his officer, his page, anything that will give me the right, in being near his person, to approach your own."

It was some time before the Lady Ernestina answered. She regarded him earnestly, then said seriously, and in an imposing tone, "Baron de Boiscourt, so free a course as that you offer may be approved by you, but not by me. Doubtless, this lesson may have been learned in Palestine, where, if report speak true, all women—Christian as well as Turk—are so depraved, that each has a lover for each night, or it may be, that our licentious Queen, who,

first the noble Conrad, and then yourself, had taken into the royal bed of Louis, has made you deem me wanton also, and willing that passion alone should be my guide to happiness. If such be your thought, de Boiscount, you have judged me wrongfully. Not France, in all its length and breadth, can show a heart profounder in its mighty depth of love, but as its depth so is its constancy. The man to which I yield my love, is only second to my God. Such love as you could render me sufficed for all my heart then knew, nor once could the tempter—and there were many who boldly pressed their suit—win me from fidelity in your absence, to the love I bore you. Such had ever been that love—such would have been my sweet contentment, but in an evil hour, you yourself seduced my soul from its allegiance, drove thence your own long-cherished image, and filled it with a phantom, which imagination moulded into such life and strength, and beauty, that my sick soul languished for the embodiment. It came at length, and under your own sanction. From that hour you were dead to me. My heart was filled to repletion. I could not wear a second wooer to my heart—the thought to me was sacrilege. It would have destroyed the charm, the mystery of the fierce passion that overwhelmed our souls. Neither could offer enough to the other. With constancy like mine, then, which is the sweet life of love, hope not ever to renew the rights which once were yours, but now, surrendered by you, are Abdallah's."

"Is it possible—can this be real! do you then reject my love, Ernestina?"

"De Boiscount," she answered calmly, "I do not reject, but I cannot receive. My soul revolts at the very thought. Think better of it. Henriette loves you, and well do I know that she is beautiful—ay, sweetly beautiful. Espouse her."

"Espouse Henriette! and is this the language you use—the counsel you give to your lawful husband—your husband in the sight of God and man?"

"Lawful or unlawful," she replied, "it matters not. The marriage was performed under the impression that you were no more. To my second husband I owe all the fidelity I bore the first; and, therefore, I swear it, no man can share the love of Ernestina, but the father of the child in which she glories. Leave me, de Boiscount. What you ask never can be granted."

"But, Ernestina—"

"I have said it," she interrupted, emphatically. "Fulfil your threat—avow yourself as the Baron de Boiscount, falsely supposed dead. Drive us from the chateau as paupers and wanderers. The forest shall be our home. We will toil for life, with our own unaccustomed hands, if only that it may be spent in the endearments of our surpassing love. The depth of our affection will give us wherewithal to sustain our strength, and with that and health what care we for the vain superfluities of the world? One only thought animates our being—for one only object do we live. Take from us that, and the cord of existence is at once snapped asunder."

"Have a care, Ernestina!" he exclaimed wildly, "that you do not drive me to desperation. There are bounds to human fortitude and forbearance. Sooner," he added, raising his clasped hands to heaven, and shedding tears of agony, "would I have believed in the crushing of the world around me, than in the possibility that you could ever be false. But again," he resumed

fiercely, and in the desponding voice of one utterly without hope—"I care not how much you love Abdallah—let this Hercules, this Samson—whose strength you so dote on, consume you with it if he will, yet that will I also—nor shall any human power prevent me. Ernestina, you have been candid with me, I shall be equally so with you. I do not say that notwithstanding the past, I do not still love you to a certain extent; but my will is greater than my love. Nay, look not grave, as though the power of love was a stranger to your heart. Mine you shall be even at this moment, so submit, willingly as women sometimes do in Palestine—unwillingly, as oftener I have seen them when forced within the embrace of men whose passions were aroused, made mad, even as I am now, by gazing on their beauty."

"And do you really mean, de Boiscourt?" continued the Lady Ernestina, shrinking from his determined look.

"I mean," he answered, his eye flashing fire, and his face crimsoning, even under his disguise, "that Abdallah shall not pillow on that bosom until my head has been there. Come then, sweet wife, that art no wife; in spite of fate and ten thousand Monk-Knights, once more, at least, you shall be mine."

He threw himself at her side, upon the couch, caught her firmly round the waist with his left arm, and attempted to loose her morning and unbelted dress with the other hand.

"Abdallah! oh, Abdallah! she shrieked, "where are you?—Loathsome man, unhand me."

"Heed not Abdallah," he interrupted. "It is by my device he is away, and by my device he will yet remain. But, ah! what a treasure has he garnered here. By my soul I could love him for this. Nay, sweet one, you cannot reproach yourself with the sin, since such you deem it."

In vain the Lady Ernestina struggled. De Boiscourt tore open her dress, from the bosom to the waist, but ere he had accomplished this, she had fainted.

De Boiscourt was no sooner aware of this than his noble nature reproached him. True, he felt that he had perfect right to act as he had acted; but it was, nevertheless, revolting to his feelings to resort to violence for that which love alone should accord, and yet worlds could not have stayed the wild impulse of his excited soul.

"Oh! Ernestina, forgive me," he said. "I knew not what I did, or rather knowing, I had not the power to resist the fascination of these well-remembered charms. Well can I conceive what must be the love, the rapture of Abdallah."

"Monster!" she exclaimed, forcing herself with a violent effort from his embrace, and starting to her feet, "my curse upon you for having thus polluted me. My peace of mind is gone—my purity destroyed. How shall I ever look again on him, whose child, once bright and holy, is tainted with this sin. Hear me," she said, sinking and raising her clasped hands, "even as once I loved you, so now I hate. To live beneath your roof were lingering torture worse than death. This night Abdallah and myself will leave it; for I should die to meet once more the author of my shame, the man whose boasting eye should tell me at each turn his guilty knowledge of

my husband's wife. Leave me, false knight alone," she concluded, rising, for should Abdallah enter, he must know the crime, I fain would hide from him, and then what can save you from his vengeance?"

"Let him come," said the Baron, with excitement. Let him show to us whether he bears a charmed life. Listen to me, wife of two husbands, who has tasted of more joy in five and twenty summers, than ever fell to the lot of created woman in fifty. Let Abdallah come, and in the death struggle contend with me for mastery of your peerless person. Tell me, shall the victor have the spoil? Will you be the wife of him who conquers?"

"Your wife! never, de Boiscourt. No man's wife but his; it were mockery of love to take another. Abdallah's arms or the grave!"

"Oh! what exceeding lewdness," said the Baron, fiercely as he tightly grasped her arm. "You pretend it not, and yet you unblushingly avow it. Why did you first love and wed this Monk? Shall I tell you? Because your wanton and dissatisfied soul, sought unlawful pleasure in the arms of one whom I had painted as cold and stern to woman. Your inmost soul has revelled in the vast joy; and the fulness, the endearingness of his power has shut your heart to every other man. This," he continued, fiercely, "is the true cause of your conduct to me; not love, but passion usurped dominion over your soul. A greater love cannot admit a lesser. You have no time for weaker joys than what Abdallah yields. Nay, even now, while revelling in your unwilling arms, your very hate of me could not restrain your love for him. I but pronounced his name, coupled with endearing whispered words of tenderness, when, even amid the seeming loathing of your heart, you repeated it, and first suspending your resistance, became my own even of your own accord."

"'Tis false. I never did."

"You do not recollect it," he answered, with a bitter smile. "At first I feared your struggling would baffle me; but, no sooner did I pronounce the Monk-Knight's name with other words, when, with a deep sigh, you fainted; then my happiness was complete, for it was mixed with your compelled though unconscious sighs."

"'Tis false, again. I never did so," she exclaimed. "Leave me, traitor, leave me, instantly, lest ill result from this. De Boiscourt, words cannot tell with what hate I hate you."

"Is it even so," he said, fiercely. "Then, since this may be the last chance afforded let me not play the fool."

At that moment the door of the summer-house opened, and Abdallah appeared at the entrance. Stupefied at the sight he covered his eyes with his hands, and stood for some moments buried in calm but profound thought. When he at length spoke, it was serenely, not in anger.

"De Boiscourt," he said, "you have provoked the fate you are now destined to suffer. Never after this shall you behold the Lady Ernestina more. Even as Rome could not contain two Cæsars, so can her beauty not contain two masters. It was yours, it is mine. Of your own free will you gave it me. You seduced my soul to adore it. I have done so; oh! how wildly, how dearly. And yet I am not jealous. Ah! no: neither am I a mere boy to punish rudely, what well I know your inmost soul must die to lose. Who

of his own willingness leaves heaven for hell must feel but anguish and despair—the torments of the damned. Nay, by my soul, I am glad that, not consenting, you have taken that will make your knowledge of our joys more perfect, and sting the memory to madness."

The unhappy Knight folded his arms, and stood upright, and with contemptuous look gazed on him whom he had once loved with a warmth and tenderness surpassing those of man for man.

"Most proud do I feel," he said, with an attempt at sarcasm, "to be thus lectured by the friend—the holy, scrupulous, and conscientious friend—to whom I gave my all on earth, reserving not a corner for myself in the once faithful heart of my wife; but this, remember, on the sole condition of my fall. I trusted in his honor, even as I trust in heaven, to restore her, polluted or unpolluted, with his passion, should I return. Would, would that I had been left to die upon that fatal field!"

The Monk-Knight covered his face with his hands, and seemed deeply agitated. Then collecting himself: "De Boiscourt," he said, "I feel this reproach bitterly. I felt it when you aimed the death-blow at my heart; for at a single glance, even under your disguise, I knew you, and was desolated by your presence."

"What has been done," returned the Baron, with sudden animation, "cannot be undone. You have revelled in the matchless beauty of my wife. I have tasted that of yours. The past cannot be recalled; therefore, even as I proposed to Ernestina, so do I propose to you. She shall be your wife by holy rite of Church, the last performed, while I, sinking my name and title, and all claim to these estates in favor of her child, remain your faithful squire. She will then be the wife of two husbands who long have loved each other with more than a mere human love, and therefore but of one——"

The Monk-Knight started as if a serpent had stung him. He looked at the features of the Lady Ernestina, as if to gather there her answer. Unutterable scorn was upon her brow. His answer was in accordance.

"Baron de Boiscourt," he said, gravely, "well it is that you no longer form a portion of the high-minded knight force of Palestine. What, pander to your own dishonor, or deem such courses to fasten on Abdallah! Never. This may be the Gallic creed—a creed intended to descend to ages, yet unborn in France, but it is not mine. The Moorish blood that flows within my veins, and which, once ice, the perfect knowledge of the sex of her we both do love hath turned to scalding lava in my veins, recoils with horror from such foul admixture. No matter how obtained—in error or in wrong—the sacred treasure of her love where God has set his mystic seal is mine, and deep remorse, and guilt, and shame, would overwhelm my soul, could such baseness enter it. Hope it not, Sir Baron. If I had not crushed you for that which passed beneath my very eyes—this violence done to her who was your wife and now is mine—it was because it was too late to remedy. No punishment of mine could ever unmake the past. There was another reason: forbearance was in mercy due to one who had laid the foundation of my own wild happiness, even at the utter sacrifice of his own. Go, then, Baron, yet, for the last time—see, behold," he said fiercely, as he caught the Lady Er-

nestina to his heart, wilfully and wantonly disordering her already disordered dress in the act—"yes, even for the last time, do you gaze upon the maddening beauty of her for whom you yourself have caused me to renounce religion, chastity, and the Cross, for ever. I pardon your conduct to my noble wife. All, I forgive, in consideration of the past; but the seal of our once strong friendship is broken—the tie is snapped asunder, never to be reunited."

"Go," said the Lady Ernestina, haughtily, yet sneeringly, while she suffered the Monk-Knight to torture the unhappy de Boiscourt with the rich display of her fascinating beauty. "Here is my lover, my husband," she continued, throwing her right arm round his Herculean neck, without altering a position, which carried madness to the soul of the forsaken one. "Behold! I am his—go, and carry with you, the recollection of the past—enshroud yourself in the anticipation of the future. Think ever of what you have lost—of what I have gained. Let it be your never-ending punishment in life to behold me in Abdallah's arms, wantoning in bliss, and without words to tell him the magnitude of happiness with which he fills me."

De Boiscourt's hair appeared to stand on end—his face was distorted—his eyes wild and glowing—his breathing difficult—he dropped on his knees—he raised his clenched hands to Heaven.

"Do I live," he exclaimed, with unearthly hoarseness, and gnashing his teeth, "or am I in hell, and suffering the torments of the damned? But ha! I have it. Thank Heaven, I am not dead. I will live; yes, I will live. That will do. Oh! damnable wife and friend, whom I have loved, so loved, that self was annihilated in my deep regard for you. Look not at me so, with such treacherous compassion—I hate you both."

He rose wildly from his knees—he staggered to the door, which Abdallah opened for him. He rushed forth with uncertain steps, even as a drunken man, and with a piteous heart-rending groan of anguish, disappeared in the depths of the forest.

There are sudden and unaccountable changes in the human mind which fill the man of reflection with deep enduring pain, mixed with mortification at the construction of his own nature. This was an instance. A sweet illusion had been destroyed, and with it, one of the noblest hearts that ever throbbed in the breast of man.

CHAPTER XXVII.

UPWARDS of three weeks had elapsed since the strange, exciting, and even fearful scene, recorded in the last chapter. It was now midnight, as two men might be seen crouching in the shadow of the summer-house, and heard conversing in a low tone.

"Is all prepared?" inquired he who seemed to be the master. Are the rooms furnished with all possible luxury, as I ordered?"

"They are, Monseigneur," was the reply. "I superintended the furnishing myself, and took devilish good care, while providing the eatables and drinkables, to lay in a good stock of that Cyprus wine he relishes so much, and his fondness for which had well nigh cost me my life—you know where. Dame! that will serve to increase his punishment by giving more fever to his blood, without the power to quench it. Oh! how I hate that Monk-Knight. I have been longing for his life ever since that night before the battle of Tiberias."

"True, Cœur-de-Fer, it cannot be denied that he used you harshly on that occasion. How you came to survive the blow is miraculous."

"It was a long time before I recovered," returned Cœur-de-Fer; "however, that is another affair—we'll talk of that later. But now, Monseigneur, to visit the secret chambers. I'll show you that everything is done to your satisfaction, and as you desired. Please to follow me. I have a dark lantern to light us through the passage that opens from the forest, and conducts to the cells of the castle. You shall see for yourself how I have managed matters."

De Boiscourt followed his guide and former groom, who, after arriving at a small open space in the front, removed a quantity of dried leaves and branches. This act discovered a small trap-door, about three feet square, imbedded in a framework of stone, and provided with a strong ring, by means of which he lifted it up. Descending first, he lighted his lantern, when he thought he had got sufficiently far to prevent the danger of the reflection being seen by any one who might be in the neighborhood. The Baron taking the trap-door flat on the upturned palm of his hand, and suffering it to descend as he descended, finally closed the aperture. He followed Cœur-de-Fer through a long, winding and labyrinthan passage—the side-walls of which were of such massy thickness, that no sound could possibly have been heard through them. They had proceeded about half an hour through winding corridors and intersecting branches of the same passage, seemingly built for the very purpose of misleading those not thoroughly acquainted with the intricacies of the cavern, when Cœur-de-Fer stopped suddenly, and sounding with a huge hammer, with which he was provided, stated that they had reached the point desired.

"Ah! ça, Monseigneur, hard work it will be for others to discover the entrance here, even if they should find the way in from above," he remarked, exultingly, "since I scarcely can discover it myself."

"It is a place just fitted for the purpose, Cœur-de-Fer," remarked the Baron.

"So, so; how nicely that spring answers to the touch of my nail, and then the door opens without noise upon its hinges. One would have thought it had been in daily use for the same purpose for a century at least. Ah, ca, here we are. A little more light, though, would not be amiss."

Cœur-de-Fer now took one from a heap of torches that lay in one corner of the room, and having lighted this from his own lamp, the whole space was soon illuminated, and even astonished the Baron, who had in some degree been prepared for it. The walls were strongly built, and almost hard and polished as marble, and where not covered with the most voluptuous repre-

sentations of the loves of the heathen deities—as well as scriptural subjects—was of the most perfect workmanship. The floor was covered with small mats, like those of the principal rooms of the chateau. Easy chairs, ottomans, tabourets, music, paintings, books, some of the latter of a very equivocal character, were strewn about the tables; wines, of all kinds and vintage; preserved meats, water, biscuits, fruits—almost every viand exciting to the palate, which could be imagined, were piled up on shelves supported by strong brackets driven into the wall; and everything was in equal proportion at either side of the room. This again, divided from one end to the other by a strong, open iron railing, about three inches in thickness, firmly welded and soldered into the extremities of the wall at many points, was further strengthened by strong stanchions, let into the floor, and made to support the vast pile, at every six inches of its length. It reached to the very roof, and was riveted to the ceiling in the same manner as to the sides. The bars were just sufficiently asunder to admit a hand, but not always that, for except when the blood was driven to the shoulder by holding the arm in a perpendicular position, this was difficult of attainment. At one extremity of each division of this apartment, some forty feet in height, a sleeping apartment had been put up, with a smaller room within, luxuriously furnished also, and provided with open gratings, set in the stone also, and communicating with the vaults beneath. A fountain of clear and running water supplied two branches of a pipe that conducted into marble baths. This water, when used, was let off through other pipes into the gutters, through which it passed away.

“You have done well, *Cœur-de-Fer*,” said the Baron, approvingly. “I could not myself have planned a place more suited to the purpose. Little will they think, on entering it, how fearful a place of punishment, notwithstanding its seeming comfort, it will prove to them. But how will you manage the abduction? It must be done in all secrecy, and will require not a few stout hearts to secure Abdallah.”

“The whole of the men-at-arms, Monseigneur, are eager to join in making captive the man they hate for his foul murder of their comrades. He will have some trouble to escape their strength and vigilance.”

“*Cœur-de-Fer*,” said the Baron, gravely, “mind that they obey my orders. Nothing of violence, recollect, beyond what is necessary to secure his person. Should I hear the slightest complaint of unnecessary rudeness to either, beware of my displeasure.”

“But, Monseigneur,” returned the ill-looking *Cœur-de-Fer*, “suppose all do not entertain the same fear of your displeasure. There are some spirits that thirst so deeply for the opportunity of punishing this Monk, it will be hard to restrain their desire for vengeance.”

“Sirrah,” said the Baron, imperatively: “you have had my orders—I shall make you personally responsible for any unnecessary violence that may be offered. All I require of you is the security of their persons. No injury must be inflicted—no word of insult offered. They must,” he pursued, almost savagely, “be in the full enjoyment of their perfect health. Do you understand me?”

“I do, Monseigneur. Depend upon it I shall watch them as the tiger does

its prey. But faith, your cruelty surpasses mine. Yes," he continued, exulting at the thought, "they shall have the most nutritious food. From the garden I will supply them daily with the most sense-subduing flowers. Wine—ah! that Cyprus sticks in my throat yet—shall be ever near to tempt him. See that trellis-work, Monseigneur, it is so managed that a long and narrow flask may be passed through it, and the Lady Ernestina made to glow with deeper passion for her paramour."

"Stop!" thundered de Boiscourt, fiercely, "do what I command, but cease your vile speech. Presume not to speak of your mistress but with the respect her position and rank demand."

"My lord shall be obeyed," said the fellow, sullenly; "and now will Monseigneur give me my last orders."

"First, I must know how you propose to act to secure Abdallah."

"I have arranged all that," was the reply. "One of our men is to go as their postillion from Clermont. They do not start until evening, so that at midnight, by stopping frequently and driving slowly to preserve their horses' feet, which it is intended slightly to lame, their journey will not have advanced beyond the centre of the forest, where a dozen men will be placed, dressed as peasants and wood-cutters, but with their trusty arms and thongs of strength concealed beneath their simple garb. They will so manage, that when the heart of the forest is gained, a wheel of the carriage shall come off, which will compel the parties to alight. That will be the moment chosen to spring upon him, and bind him with the cords provided by them. I confess, Monseigneur, I should have liked to prick his throat a little with my bodkin, but since you say no, no harm shall come to him."

"And what do you intend to do, when you have bound him?" again questioned de Boiscourt, less with a view to information than to know if Cœur-de-Fer rightly understood the part he was to act.

"When we have secured him, the carriage-wheel will be put on again—the purposed laming of the horses rectified, and their heads turned to the spot through which we just now descended. First, the Lady Ernestina will be lowered, and the Monk will freely follow. One trusty man alone will go with me, for I suppose Monseigneur would not like many to know the secret of the door. The cells shall be as palaces, the lights therein brilliant and dazzling to the eye—all rich with luxury and temptation to the sense."

"Right," observed the Baron; "but how will you manage to separate them? Like a lion raging in his den will Abdallah be, when he finds his mate not with him."

"That, Monseigneur, I have provided for. When first he enters, the Monk-Knight, dazzled by the strong light, succeeding darkness, will not perceive the two cells, or rather the separate rooms. Confidingly he will enter, believing that the partner of his guilty love —"

"Hold, ruffian!" said de Boiscourt, grasping him by the throat; "speak not thus slightly of the Lady de Boiscourt—of my wife. It is enough for me to think and feel as I will; but, fellow—recollect the difference of our position."

"Well, Monseigneur, pardon if I have offended—I meant no harm."

Well, as I was saying, when he enters, his cage shall be instantly closed upon him, and locked and barred, never more to open. Then, when he thunders out his fury and his grief, the Lady Ernestina shall be conducted to her room, the door of which, when she has entered, will quickly groan upon its hinges for the last time, unless, indeed, Monseigneur pleases——"

"I understand you—no more of that. But how will the cords of Abdallah be removed? he must not do it himself; and even if the delicate fingers of the Lady Ernestina were strong enough to untie those rude knots, she could not do so through the bars."

"For that, too, Monseigneur, I have provided. When once the cage of the second prisoner is fastened, I shall hand her, through the bars, a long sharp knife, wherewith to cut them when alone. Don't you think that will do admirably, Monseigneur?"

Again the Baron took a minute survey of the furniture of the two rooms. Everything appertaining to comfort—nay, to luxury, had been provided. Two trap-doors, of about eighteen inches square, had been cut in the ceiling, which was of a sombre color, the better to prevent them from being seen below. Those, particularly, drew the attention of the Baron, who declared them perfect, and most difficult of detection.

"All this is well, Cœur-de-Fer," he said; "nothing of the kind could have been more adroitly planned, and well have you deserved your hundred crowns. You have the guardianship here, and the only punishment I would inflict upon the Monk-Knight, besides that most cruel which these separate chambers are meant to impose, is that of seeing, ever and anon, in close attendance on his person, him whom he knows to have so much cause to hate him."

"Ah! *gar çà-bou!* I can fancy he will look surprised when first he sees me as one risen from the dead to reproach him for the foul murders that he committed in Palestine, without other cause than drinking a little of his wine. *Pardieu!* if I refused him there, I shall make up for it now. He shall have wine enough to turn his blood to fire."

"But no violence, recollect. You must treat him even as you do the Lady Ernestina—with deference and gentleness."

"Well," answered Cœur-de-Fer, scratching his head, and looking puzzled, "that is a hard condition, to keep from telling him what I think of his brutal murder of my comrade and attempt to destroy myself for merely taking a cup of his wine."

"That is false, knave!" said the Baron sternly. "He nearly slew you, and you richly deserved it; not for the wine, but because you were about to murder the poor boy—the gentle Rudolph. I have a reckoning yet for that with you."

"Did he say that I intended to murder him?" questioned Cœur-de-Fer, with affected astonishment. "It is false. It was him that attacked me. You would not have thought it, Monseigneur, but he jumped at my throat like a young tiger."

"Poor boy! I only wish he were here to tell his own story," said the Baron. "But he was wounded even before myself in the next day's battle: I fear he has been slain."

"It is false as hell! *Monsieur*," he continued, assuming confidence in the absence of all contradictory testimony against him. "He had me by the throat when I was down, and would have strangled me had not the cursed Monk made short work of the matter with his damned scimeter. He gave me a scar, the marks of which, will remain for life."

De Boiscourt replied not. He knew that the villain was telling a gross falsehood, but as he was necessary to his purpose, he thought it better not to provoke, by appearing to mistrust him.

"Well, no matter who was the aggressor," he continued. The poor boy was no match for you, and you ought to have avoided all struggle with him, if only for my sake."

"I will make up for it," he answered, "by my conduct to the Monk. He shall not complain, I warrant me, of not overdosing him with wine, and all the good things he may want but one," and here he grinned horribly.

"It must be near day-break," said the Baron, interrupting him, and if we linger longer, some peasant, bound to his daily toil, may chance to pass as we ascend to earth, and discover our retreat. We must be speedy and cautious."

Again the lamps, all of which had been lighted to show the Baron the effect of the artificial day, which in future was to continue unchanged in the cavern, were put out, the door bolted, and the entrance from the passage hermetically closed.

As before, *Cœur-de-Fer* led the way. He raised the trap-door in the forest, looked eagerly round, and perceiving that there was no intruder near, beckoned to the Knight, who vaulted lightly to the surface. The door was then dropped into its grooved frame, leaves and branches were spread over it as before, and in less than three minutes, there was nothing to betray its existence. Cautiously, thus, they wound their way along a narrow path, which led to some distance in the rear of the chateau. In a lonely part of this wood, and branching off abruptly fifty yards from the scarcely distinguishable path, rose a small rude cabin. This was the place of concealment of de Boiscourt, who was still disguised as when he had first made his appearance before the Lady Ernestina and the Monk-Knight, not a month before.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE Monk-Knight and the Lady Ernestina were in the secret rooms which had been assigned to them. The artifice of Cœur-de-Fer had completely succeeded. Even as he stated would be the case, was their capture and detention effected. They had now been ten days in their confinement. Ten days! What an eternity of separation for those who truly love. Bitter, indeed, were their sensations when told by Cœur-de-Fer, as he closed the door leading to the passage, that they were condemned to live for ever thus, and that their tormentor—he, on whom they had lavished all manner of abuse—was the injured husband, who, unrelenting in his vengeance, had pronounced their doom irrevocable and perpetual.

Ah! how their hearts died within them, when first the vastness of the privation they were to endure struck with all its force upon their minds. They were at a paralyzation—incapable of judgment or of action. But by degrees, as the stupor of surprise passed away, the fierce reaction of mind succeeded. Then came the wild expression of the full and desiring heart. They called upon each other by the most endearing names. These with their glances of fire caused them to precipitate themselves against the barrier that divided them. The hands of Abdallah were lacerated in his impetuous and vain efforts to force them through the strong bars, and clasp the waist of the beloved one. The Lady Ernestina was near frantic, her delicate hand and arm were, after a few unsuccessful efforts, passed through, even up to the shoulder. Ah! what words can express her delight. Again she lived a new life! To be permitted the happiness of simply touching the form of him she so wholly loved, was a madness of rapture she would not have exchanged for the possession of the universe. Her arm was ever there, and it was only when Abdallah urged her in the strongest manner to take nourishment and repose that she finally consented to part with, what she seemed to fear would, when once withdrawn, be lost to her possession for ever. Even this, though a source of joy, was such only to one. The madness of disappointment came over the soul of the Monk-Knight. His veins became filled almost to bursting. The calm, the benevolence of expression of his noble countenance had wholly vanished, and was replaced not by the pure and holy, and refined passion which had ever hitherto been reflected from it, but by the strong desire of the mere animal. He knew it—he felt it—he almost loathed himself for it, but he could not resist; for, stung by her own feelings, the Lady Ernestina, whose increasing pregnancy gave her tenfold beauty in his eyes, so added fuel to his fire by the fond manner in which her caressing arms were thrown around him, that, had the sense of touch remained, he could have cut off his right hand with the knife that had been used to sever his bonds, and deemed the apparent sacrifice a blessing.

Maddened, infuriated, excited beyond all power of control, several times he induced the Lady Ernestina to withdraw her arm—withdrawn only for the purpose which he named—and then, stepping back the full breadth of the

apartment, rushed with giant strength to the barrier, and darted furiously against it with his now strong and muscular shoulder. But the compact mass resisted all his efforts, and was scarce shaken by the attempt. Then, with despair in his heart, he cast himself furiously upon the floor, tore his hair, and groaned in deep agony of his spirit, calling on his wife to take pity on him—to save him from the hell that was consuming his very entrails.

"What is the matter, Sir Monk?" once asked a rufian voice—"doing penance for your Palestine murders. Hardly worth attempting that, they are too many. Better console yourself with a flask of Cyprus wine, than rave at what cannot be helped. See, I have sent you a supply of everything good. Pates, roast capons, oysters, lobsters, everything that can tickle the appetite in the way of eating; and then to wash them down, there is in the other hamper Chamberlain, Cloix, Vogos, Burgundy, and what you know you used to like very much in Palestine, Tuscany and Cyprus wine. Surely, with all these good things to stir your blood, you can afford to forego one lust of the flesh. Eh, Monk, remember the fate of Thibaud!"

The Monk-Knight started to his feet with a vivacity, that in a man of his size, was more remarkable than even his prodigious strength. He glanced around with clenched hands, as if eager to seize, and destroy, and rend asunder the wretch who could thus taunt and insult him in the hour of his profound misery, but he was nowhere to be seen, nor was it until he had remarked a basket, containing provisions, descending immediately over his own room, that he could understand whence the voice proceeded. When the basket reached the floor, a sudden spring released the rope, which was hauled suddenly up, and the trap reclosed. The voice had seemingly come from the opening in the passage; but now it was clear, although nobody was seen, that it had proceeded from above. The conviction that they were thus to be confined and nourished through life, or until some unforeseen chance should deliver them, was now apparent. It struck upon Abdallah's heart with fearful force, and alternately he raved and wept, and frantically paced the apartment.

The Lady Ernestina, leaning her head against the bars, watched his every movement. As he moved, her glance followed. She had no eyes but for him. They could not rest on any other object. At length a sudden thought occurred to the Monk-Knight. He darted, almost flew to the inner chamber, and drew from it the low but capacious couch which nightly received his limbs—this he placed against the grating.

"Let us wring comfort from despair, beloved one," he said, in a deep and hollow tone. "At least we may always be near each other—to gaze into each other's eyes—to speak to each other's heart. If then those fair and fragile hands can find the strength to do even as I have done, that even do. If we are doomed by de Boiscourt, whose cruelty I scarce can credit, even though much I have deserved it, to perish thus, let not a moment of our lives be lost in tasting of the shade of joy that yet remains."

In some degree comforted by the new thought, which she was astonished had not sooner occurred to either of them, the Lady Ernestina, after some little time spent in the effort, succeeded in drawing her own couch, similar in height and size and form, opposite to that of Abdallah's; both leaving a

space between the heads of the bedsteads and the wall large enough to contain a table, on which, in order to lose as little time as possible from each other, they placed such refreshments as they were likely most to need.

And thus, oh heaven! they lay—the majestic husband and the glowing but much-exhausted wife, side by side, and separated only by the cold, unfeeling iron that seemed to frown displeasure on their murmured prayers for its removal. A space of not a span in breadth divided them; and yet, had one been cleaving heads and counting beads in Palestine, as had been his wont; and the other, toying in tender dalliance with the sweet Henriette, in the boudoir of the castle, while sighing forth her soul for the absent one, they could not have been more asunder. But the one redeeming joy remained, and with tears of gratitude the Lady Ernestina thanked the God of all goodness for its possession. Her arm extended so far through the bar that she could embrace the fevered form of her husband, as thrilling under her touch it heaved convulsively. But then, as she gazed into his eyes, and marked the large drops of agony that lingered on his not now benignant but distorted brow, her emotion became intense, and often would she shed tears upon the insensate bars, in the vain hope, sustained by love alone, that rusting beneath the oft-repeated moisture, they might be made to yield to the strength of Abdallah's arm. But no such comfort came, and, in the end, the wild feeling of their misery became unendurable.

"I can no more," groaned Abdallah. "Could I even pass my hand through these most cruel and un pitying bars, one half this monstrous weight of misery would be removed. We then, sweetest, should be half, if not wholly comforted. But ah! it cannot be—and yet, there is no sacrifice short of Heaven, that I would not make to press that form once more to mine—even to the rending of my own flesh with my own nails, till scarce an inch remained upon these aching bones."

"Oh! what shall I do?" frantically exclaimed the Lady Ernestina. "Inspire me, Providence—teach me, Heaven! Pour into my soul the undiscovered knowledge of the means to spare his torture. My thought is wild. His head must pillow on my burning bosom. Relief he must find within these arms, or both must surely die."

"One hope more!" he resumed. "Here are two tubes of parchment: take one, place it to your lips, and let me inhale the ambrosial breath of my beloved."

Eagerly she seized and applied her lips to one end of the tube. The effect in their excited and restricted state was startling. Their breathing into each other's lips was like liquid fire distilled into their veins. It was the first time since their confinement that they had tasted each other's breath. Instilled as it now was into their already burning souls, it set them wild. Both, as if actuated by one common impulse, sprang from their couches, and stood facing each other through the open bars. Their excitement was fearful, and yet they gloried in the poison that was slowly killing them. Again the tube was passed that they might the better approach each other, standing as they did. The Lady Ernestina was compelled, in order to prevent her from sinking to the floor, to cling with her left hand to the bars, while her right arm was passed through to the very shoulder with such

earnestness of desire to embrace all she could of the form of her beloved, that her breast was indented with the shape of the interposing iron. Almost fainting under the intensity of his vast love, he devoured her hand with kisses that were often turned into bites, while the strange admixture of calm and passionate expression on his brow, on which, moreover, stood large drops of agony, was fearful to behold.

Despondency was in the inmost heart of the Lady Ernestina. She sank on her knees in bitterness, and wept profoundly.

Anxious to console her, and heedless of the futility of a hundred previous attempts to accomplish the same object, the Monk sank on his knees also, and endeavored, with his soothing hand, to reach the object of his soul's worship. To his astonishment, he partially succeeded, the hand and arm passing through as high as the joint of the elbow, but no farther; and when the Lady Ernestina, whose head was bowed in unutterable sorrow to the ground, first felt his hand upon her shoulder, she started as if some sharp instrument had pierced her; then, uttering a shriek of agonized delight, she lay clinging to the bars, trembling, palpitating, breathing, as if those moments were to be her last. It happened that the perpendicular of the bars, still firmly imbedded as ever, had not strictly been preserved at this point, so that the Monk-Knight had managed to get his naked arm through as far as the elbow, but no farther.

From that moment, the couches were made to occupy that spot, and opposite to each, and no language can paint the depth of the emotion of both, when the Monk-Knight's hand first, after such long privation, wandered over the bosom of the mother of his child. All other senses were absorbed in that of touch. The most passionate endearments were theirs, for mutually they caressed each other with a tenderness unequalled, and the more intoxicating by reason of the limit imposed upon the means of gratification of their tempestuous love. Their sighs of happiness at this new and precious discovery were breathed through the tube that connected lip with lip.

CHAPTER XXIX.

For more than a fortnight had matters remained in this state. Daily the Lady Ernestina was advancing in her pregnancy, and Abdallah's mind was distracted not only by his forebodings, but the stings of his increased love for her. She had become so dear to him, that it was agony to continue longer asunder from her. Language cannot depict his feelings, or tell how vast was the extent of his love. It was a disease—it carried slow death in its suppression—for, if possible, his position had become even worse than it was when he was without the power to pass his arm through the bars. Now, he was tantalized by constant recurrence to those well-remembered charms which hourly maddened him on their utter removal from his possession; he became absolutely ill, and a high fever coursed through his veins.

"Abdallah! oh Abdallah! what can I do!" exclaimed the Lady Ernestina, as she wound her arm around him with all the energy of deep passion, "what—what can I do to cool this fever of your blood? I would sacrifice life a thousand times—aye, dearer far than that, I would sacrifice these charms—my child—to the most loathsome thing that ever wore the human form, if my reward were but the rending asunder of those hateful bars. Oh! know you not," she said fiercely, pressing the hand that lingered in her own—"know you not some words of sorcery in your own Eastern land, that might call down a ghoul—a vampire—Satan himself—unto my arms, that by so overloading him with my sweets, my teeming woman's love, I may win him in blissful dalliance to rend these bars, and bear us hence for ever; or, let him assume the shape of a toad, or the serpent that wooed the tender Eve to passion, and I will so gorge him with plenteousness of delight that very ugliness, fostered by myself, will become exceeding beauty."

Suddenly as she spoke these words, fiercely, and with strong excitement of manner, the trap-door above her own head was heard to open. Both she and the Monk-Knight looked up, hoping yet fearing, they knew not what.

"A temporary relief from the purgatory to which you have through your own will subjected yourselves, may be yours on one condition," said a well-known voice. It was de Boiscourt's.

"Name it," said the Lady Ernestina eagerly, and half rising from her pillow. "Anything—everything to bring comfort to my soul's lord: ay, even though it be—as well I know it is—to receive into these arms the man I most hate."

"It is!" said de Boiscourt, fiercely. "From this I have watched you throughout; and hate for the very love you bear that treacherous Monk which would induce you to do this, gives a piquancy to my desire, such as I never felt for you, even when you loved me most. As ghoul, or vampire, or Satan, is not here, to quench the tumult of your passion, far better take a goodly and a proper man—one most meet to riot in your woman's gorgeousness."

"Then, come, mere lecher—hated of my soul. Enjoy your triumph.

Revel in this beauty if you will; but know that in the fulness of the feeling you provoke I most shall loathe you—most shall be Abdallah's. Only my strong love for him induces my consent."

"Be it so," said the Baron, "I heed it not. Indeed I rather like the piquant thought. It will in some degree realize the double marriage I proposed to you."

"Beset me not with speech, de Boiscourt. Your words and voice sound hateful in my ear. When come you? Let it be instant or my resolve may change."

"This night."

"This night! The night is long, and love's impatience great. Each instant of delay is fraught with death to him I love. Come quickly—come within the hour—come now!"

"Within the hour expect me," answered the Baron.

"Then within the hour extinguish every lamp, which, I perceive, is lighted from above. In utter darkness you must come, for else each sense unwilling would hate to ratify the compact which my lips pronounce. It you have pity stay not past the hour—ay, within the hour I pray you come. But hold, how often then am I to see Abdallah thus?—him, my soul—the dearest heart-string of my life. Remember, put out the light."

"Yes," said de Boiscourt, bitterly, "even that your licentious soul may fancy the obscene ghoul feasting on your sweets, or the winged vampire fed by suction, drawing that blood which should go to the nurture of the priestly lead you bear. Or, mayhap your imagination loves to mate with Satan, while the woman's soul triumphs in the power to draw a fallen angel to her arms, and gloats incessant in comparison."

"Your idle words affect me not, de Boiscourt. Ransom you have asked—rich ransom shall you receive. But you have not said, how soon that debt being paid, the portal of his heaven shall be opened to Abdallah."

"By to-morrow's dawn you shall be joined with him, and for ever, but only in these subterranean tombs of happiness. By my knightly spurs I swear it."

"Ha! blessings on you for that. Heard you it, Abdallah, my lord, my husband. I shall go mad. Come quickly," she said to de Boiscourt, "not as one hated, but even as one to whom I owe the deepest gratitude of a woman's soul. But you will ask no more?"

"No more than what your free consent may yield. Far within the hour expect me."

"Tell me," she said wildly, to Abdallah, as the trap-door closed upon the departed Baron, "have I done right? Oh! my Abdallah, for you I have consented. For you I will slay him if you prefer. You have the knife. Even such was my thought when I proposed the darkness."

"My angel, Ernestina," he replied, with more of his wonted calm, "I know not how it is, but I delight to see some better spirit has changed your hatred to more gentle thoughts. The feeling that absorbed your mind was strange and most unnatural, and much I pitied to perceive it. De Boiscourt's heart was open as his brow. He loved you to madness; he gloried in your beauty, and excellence, and constancy, and sought to reward all these by

giving a new desire to the heart he loved. How have we repaid him? and yet we call him cruel, because he did but slight—avenge such mighty wrong as that of the spoiling of his own happiness. Always for this has my conscience so reproached me. Ah! you feel the truth of my words—you weep—your heart softens."

Suddenly the Monk stopped. The lights were extinguished, leaving deep darkness in their stead. A weight was heard descending from the trap-door. Deep emotion was in the hearts of the husband and wife. The arm of the Lady Ernestina wound itself more closely round the heaving form of the Monk-Knight. The tube passed from lip to lip, conveyed words that made Abdallah press more fervently to his beating heart, the hand he held a willing prisoner. In another minute that hand trembled in his own, significantly giving warning that the Baron had come to claim the price of their re-union.

On what further passed on that eventful night—what explanations were entered into renewing the broken bond of love and friendship, or on what arrangement made, the manuscript is silent; further than that, as the distant castle clock discoursed the early hour of dawn, the Baron and the Monk might be seen by the faint light of a lamp, which the latter had brought with him, with hand clasped in hand, and bending over the pale face and motionless form of the Lady Ernestina, who, with an enchanting smile upon her lips, and slight contortion of the brow, which those well read in love would at once have pronounced intensity of feeling, had fainted in the fulness of her sudden change from despair to hope.

The next day following that dawn was one of great rejoicing in the chateau. The return of the Baron de Boiscourt from Palestine was publicly announced—his claim to the Lady Ernestina's hand made good—the second marriage annulled by the very bishop who had performed the rite, and the Monk-Knight had disappeared. But soon in his place there came one of equally stalwart frame, and much resembling him in feature, but of a deeper complexion of the Moorish dye. Many opened their eyes and stared, and wondered at the great resemblance in dignity of demeanor of the stranger with the second husband of the Lady Ernestina; but when they heard him introduced publicly as the Italian Monk Gonzales, by the Baron himself, an old brother warrior, who had more than once interposed between himself and death in Palestine, and who had now left the sword for the cowl, and for ever, there no longer existed a doubt, and content and happiness, such as fall to the lot of few women, in a world in which man's will rules predominant, was the lot of the Lady Ernestina.

Strange, indeed, are the vicissitudes of human feeling—wayward and erratic the course of the passions, which, like fiery meteors, scorch up the soul they first enlighten. It seemed to the Lady Ernestina like the faint memory of some distant dream that she had ever ceased to regard the generous de Boiscourt but with that ardent friendship which his noble self-sacrifice so well deserved. Her estrangement had been a disease growing wholly out of the intensity—the exclusive intensity of her love for Abdallah. Carried away by the increasing waywardness of that love, she had only become indifferent to him on his return, because her constant nature could not endure the thought of a second breathing in her ear those words of passion, which

her delicacy of apprehension taught her were only priceless in their exclusiveness. By degrees this feeling increased, and acquired a certain acerbity, which finally, stung as she was by the keen sarcasm of the Baron, settled in a sentiment of deep hatred and aversion. But when he gladdened her heart with the intelligence that Abdallah and herself were to be united that night, never more to suffer the tortures of the damned behind those un pitying bars, her soul, as if acted upon by enchantment, scorned and loathed the unworthy sentiment, which her intense passion, and indifference to all but the one object of her devoted love had led her to entertain. Often in the presence of her confessor, the Monk Gonzales, would she weep tears of regret on his bosom, for the cruel language she had used to her husband on his return. But de Boiscourt would fondly press her to his heart, and ask Gonzales if all was not for the best, inasmuch as the very course taken by events had led to so happy a termination. The approving smile and voice of the now again serene and benevolent Monk, would, as often, and in various ways, endorse the opinion of his friend, and then the Lady Ernestina, her features radiant with the full and unrestrained glow of happiness, and looking more lovely and impassioned than ever, exclaim, as she fondly pressed a hand of each :

" Ah ! what have I done to deserve this vast, this unspeakable bliss ! How is it that such intense, such strange, wild, mysterious, hallowed joy has been given to me in the possession of the enduring love of two such noble beings ? "

A grand fête was given at the chateau, in honor of the Baron's re-marriage, on the very day when the Monk Gonzales first made his appearance. On this occasion of ceremony, he wore, in compliment to the re-united couple, not the plain dress, that ever after distinguished him, but the magnificent habit of a Monk-warrior of St. John, which exceedingly became his tall and majestic person. An eight-pointed cross, of purest white enamel, and emblem of his position in the Order, depended from his ample chest.

De Boiscourt himself was dressed in the costume of his knighthood, with all the stars and badges of distinction, and these were not a few, which he had won as the leader of the brave but dissolute men of Auvergne. Once more his spirits were light, and his manner animated, and many a soft word he breathed in the ear of the gentle Henriette, now grown into the fullness of womanhood, and evidently not untouched by the words of more than mere gallantry, which the Baron whispered into her ear.

On her part, the voluptuous girl was beautifully dressed also. Her long, dark and luxuriant hair fell in a profusion of rich curls, over her snow-white and but partially covered shoulders, while her costume, enchantingly fitted, and of a light material, admirably set off the contour of her form. In her hair was a single white rose, so piquantly disposed as to give, from its proximity to it, additional lustre to her dark and peculiarly expressive eye.

As for the Lady Ernestina, she has been described once, and in such colors, that to repeat would be to mar the picture of her loveliness, such as it must even now linger on the memory of those who have perused it. The perfection of her beauty, and the excellence of her style of adornment must be left to the imagination of those who, like ourselves, have so half fallen in

love with the noble image, to which life and substance has been given, that they deem her, when least adorned, adorned the most.

The fête was a brilliant one, and all the vassals of the Baron had been invited, as well as those of more noble birth around. All had gladly accepted an invitation so curious in its cause, and promising the fullest gratification and amusement. As the dancing, peculiar to those days, commenced, the living crowd poured in, and as the Lady Ernestina led off the fête, she was the admired of all admirers. Many a brilliant compliment was paid to her surpassing beauty by the young nobles around, but these she regarded only as so many offerings to be laid at the feet of Abdallah, who, leaning majestically against an oaken panel, found no pleasure so great as that produced by the admiration of others for the beloved of his soul. Frequently as she glided, rather than danced, for her situation rendered strong exertion undesirable, and replied to the rapid compliments poured into her ear by those who were the most earnest in their expression of adoration for her beauty, she would turn her speaking eyes upon Gonzales with such a volume of meaning, that the Confessor could with difficulty refrain from carrying her off in his arms from the meaningless festivity in which she was engaged.

But he was not always left alone to indulge his meditations. Many a beautiful and captivating dame of Auvergne, of high degree, cast some their bright, and some their languishing glances over his manly form, and closely watched his bearing with the Lady Ernestina. They knew that one monk had revelled in her arms, and therefore, with monkish taste so formed, why not another? No time or age had been marked by such extreme licentiousness—not love, not desire, for one loved object raged within the heart, but sheer licentiousness.

One there was within that festive hall who danced not, spoke not, but kept her eyes riveted on Gonzales. She saw the glances of intense love that passed between the Confessor and the Lady Ernestina. She saw in his eyes the fire of more than mortal man. Her own fierce passion was enkindled. She moved towards him, and as she moved she looked a queen.

"Holy Father," she said, in a low but decided tone, as, drawing her arm through his, she led him through a corridor to the garden, where had been erected many arbors of luxurious repose—"I have much to confess to you. Pardon the occasion of which I would fain avail myself."

"All times and places are suited to our holy duty," returned Gonzales, calmly. "Yet be brief, Lady, the festive party waits."

"That is to say, the Lady Ernestina—the Baroness de Bois court waits," significantly replied the Countess of Clermont, a most lovely woman. "Hear me, Monk," she said, when they had seated themselves in one of these little bosquets, "I am not jealous of the Baroness, but I too love you; my heart is torn with desire for you, and I have beauty equal to that of the Baroness, which I know will be yours this night."

"This night!" said Gonzales, startled at the strange announcement, so strangely made.

"Yes, this night."

"But, Lady, how know you this?"

"Your eyes themselves informed me—your mutual glances kindled my desire. Oh! have pity, but for once, and then absolve our mutual sin."

"It cannot be, Lady," said the Monk, with dignity. "I pray you return with me to the chateau. The guests will wonder at our absence, too long delayed."

"Oh! yet one minute stay," entreated the Countess. "Only grant my prayer. I ask no more."

"Impossible," said the Monk, utterly confounded at her perseverance.

"Recollect my sacred calling—my duty to the confessional."

"Even promise," resumed the Countess, with the deep intonation of aroused passion, "that to-morrow eve shall make me sharer in the bliss designed to-night for her for whom your soul is now enkindled; say—say, will you, to-morrow eve, repair to Clermont and seek my confessional. Oh! do, in mercy do."

She knelt at his feet—she placed his hand upon her throbbing heart, but Gonzales, with a shudder of disgust withdrew it, and hurriedly re-entered the chateau, slowly followed by the discomfited and revenge-breathing Countess.

CHAPTER XXX.

In the interim of Gonzales' short interview with the Countess, some excitement had been created by the arrival of two strangers from the Holy Land, attired in the garb of pilgrims and deeply sun-burnt. The travellers had sent in the announcement of their condition, but not their name, claiming hospitality until dawn. The Baron, ever interested in all things connected with the Holy Land, in which he had so long served, hastened himself to greet the new comers, who were even then crossing the lawn in front of the chateau.

"Oh! my dear Lord, I am so glad to see you once again," exclaimed the more youthful, bounding forward to salute the Baron, "for I feared we should never reach Auvray. How delighted I am."

"Good heaven, Rudolph! My dear boy come to my arms."

The page did as enjoined, and tears of happiness coursed rapidly down his cheeks, as he felt the well-known embrace of his master, whom he had so long lamented as dead.

"Ah! is it possible," he exclaimed. "How long have I mourned your loss?"

"Miraculously preserved even as yourself, Rudolph, it would seem, but we will talk of this later. Who is your companion? and he looked intently at one who, habited in the same garb, was more matured in person. "Can it indeed be possible. Is it she?"

"Even so, my Lord, The favorite wife of Saladin that was—the only and adored wife of Rudolph that is."

"The wife of Saladin your wife!—what mean you, Rudolph?"

"I mean—but ah! where is Abdallah!"

"Hush! not a word of Abdallah, as you love me, Rudolph. Him whom you will soon see, you must know as Gonzales. Remember Gonzales—the Italian Monk Gonzales. Answer then: how is the wife of Saladin your wife?"

"Have you not heard of his death?"

"Say you so! Never knew I aught of it until this moment. And is, then, the great warrior dead?"

"He is; else had not Zuleima left him. He was too kind, too good, too generous, to be basely abandoned by those whom most he loved. At his death he gave me freedom and great means to return to my native land, but what were means and freedom without the gentle Zuleima? She consented to become mine—embraced Christianity, and now awaits the priestly action of her brother to make her Rudolph's wife."

"Of her brother! what brother! You have returned full of mystery, Rudolph, or surely too much joy has made you mad."

"What! has not Abdallah told you that Zuleima—she whom you both saved from Thibaud and his vile associates, was dear to him as his sister?"

The Baron reflected a moment. There was a reason for Abdallah's silence in regard to one whom he never expected to behold more. He recollected the adventure in his tent. He was aware that Abdallah knew it also. This, therefore, accounted for his silence in regard to her.

"Go, dear Rudolph, embrace the Baroness and Henriette. They will not be a little surprised to see you, and in that garb; but no matter, cover them both with kisses and good greetings, while I take charge of this your bride, and introduce her to the company. Say not a word of her arrival, or who she is."

So saying, he advanced towards the expectant Zuleima, and sinking at her feet, fervently kissed her hand. Her intercourse with Rudolph had given her a tolerably fair knowledge of the French language, so that she could sufficiently understand him, when with a pressure of her hand, which threw the crimson into her cheek, for it brought back to recollection all the past, he told her that he would present her to his wife, who would be as a sister and a friend to her for ever.

Gratefully kissing his hand, she took the proffered arm of the Baron, and they entered the crowded halls, where gaiety, in all its manifold forms, was doing justice to the intentions of the princely entertainer. When they crossed the threshold, the eyes of Zuleima, accustomed even as they were to Eastern splendor and magnificence, were dazzled at the sight. Soon, as she glanced around, she saw a crowd surrounding one object of curiosity and interest. As she drew nearer she observed Rudolph, who presented a marked contrast in his pilgrim's garb, and with a large pack upon his shoulder, hanging round the neck of a woman, whose exceeding loveliness so excited her interest, but unmixed with a scarcely acknowledged shade of jealousy, that she inquired of de Boiscourt, eagerly, who she was.

"That, dearest Zuleima," said the Baron, "is the lady to whom I am about to present you—my wife, the Lady Ernestina de Boiscourt. Is she not very beautiful? You must love her, Zuleima—you must love her very dearly, for she will love you."

"Ah! the Lady Ernestina," she repeated. "Happy Abdallah! Oh! yes, she is, indeed, beautiful—I love her already, she looks so good. But see," she said, "pressing de Boiscourt's arm with much significance, under the pretence of hanging over and kissing Rudolph, a woman raises her hand in which is a rose, and pours from one of its leaves, some drops of liquid in her ear. There are so many heads together I cannot see her face. There—there, again! God grant my fears be idle, but such things are often done in Palestine."

"What do you mean, dear Zuleima," said de Boiscourt, eagerly and with a voice of deep alarm, "I can see nothing—it must have been your fancy."

"Perhaps it was," she returned with a sigh—"God grant it was. So beautiful, so sweet a woman. Ah! let me not have loved her as I do—loved her as God has intended one woman should love another—only to lose her for ever. But still my eyes are very good, they seldom tell me wrong."

Almost wild from apprehension at her words, de Boiscourt rushed towards his wife, with Zuleima still hanging on his arm, and inquired eagerly if she felt unwell. Alarmed at the question, the Monk, who had just entered the room from his oratory, whither he had for a moment gone on leaving the Countess of Clermont, both with a view to avoid her, and to prevent remark, by the appearance of undue attention to the wife of his friend, now approached the group. His tall figure was conspicuous above those who surrounded the Lady Ernestina. It was the first time Zuleima had seen him since his departure from the camp of Saladin at Tiberias, on the day following his last interview with her. Unfortunately de Boiscourt had forgotten to caution her as he had Rudolph, of the necessity of concealment of his true name.

"Abdallah!" she shrieked, rushing towards him with uplifted arms.

All was consternation and dismay. The Monk-Knight rejected her as one whom he knew not. The Baron cursed his own folly and forgetfulness. The Lady Ernestina, foreseeing something dreadful in the termination of all this, had fainted.

"A glass of water for the Baroness," said the Countess of Clermont, handing it to the Monk. "From no hand will relief come to her more gratefully than from that of him she loves."

In the agitation of the moment, Abdallah, for the first time in his life, lost his self-possession; scarce knowing from whom he received it, he took the glass and applied it to the lips of the pale and senseless Baroness.

"Ha! Abdallah, you have destroyed her you love," again exclaimed Zuleima, astonished at all that had passed before her. "That glass," she added, turning to de Boiscourt, "came from the hand of the woman who held the rose-leaf to her ear."

"Say you so!" shouted the Monk, in a voice of thunder.—"Seize that woman—seize that murderess! Even now she threatened vengeance to the Lady Ernestina, whose soul she falsely deems is guilty as her own."

"Who dares to charge to me, is her paramour," haughtily exclaimed the Countess, as she came forward, holding in her hand the unemptied glass which the Monk had returned to her. "That nothing but the thought to yield my little aid to the Baroness as the faintness that overcame her beheld the proof. See, friends, how falsely they accuse me."

So saying she deliberately raised the glass to her lips and slowly swallowed its contents—then threw herself into an attitude calculated to awaken sympathy.

"A noble and a falsely accused woman," said one.

"The niece of our holy Bishop of Clermont," added another.

"A paragon of female virtue," vociferated a third—a colossus with an arm like Vulcan, and hair like the bristles of a wild boar, who usually passed the night in her boudoir, when she was not otherwise engaged.

"What she says is true," roared out some fifty voices, the majority of which came from the lungs of men, while the ladies joined in their cry.

"This is no place for moral people to be found in. Let us go."

"Stop!" thundered the Monk-Knight, half maddened by the condition of his beloved, yet perceiving the necessity for prompt explanation to save the honor and peace of mind of those whom he most loved on earth. "That strange woman raves, or at least mistakes me. I am no other than Gonzales, so like unto Abdallah, that we have passed in Palestine as children of the same womb. Where is the page Rudolph? you see I know him: let him declare."

"What am I asked?" said the boy, speaking from a distant part of the room, and coming up at the same time.

"We will question him ourselves," said one of the more noble guests.

"Intercept us not, Monk; your innocence of this charge, which involves the respectability of the noblest family in Auvergne, will best be shown by silence. Rudolph, we all know and love you, boy, and glory in the high spirit that sent you forth, so young, to fight for the true faith in Palestine. Know you that Monk?"

"Know him!" said the boy, running up to, and embracing him. "By my faith, and if I did not know the Monk Gonzales—stay, let me look again—yes, the Monk Gonzales, who saved my life on fierce Tiberias' battlefield—I were indeed ungrateful," and he flew in the Monk's arms, and clasped his hands around his neck.

"The boy speaks truly, and with warmth," shouted one. "We believe him; yes, we believe what he has said is true."

"True!" said Rudolph, indignantly; "and who shall dare to doubt the statement that I make? and yet, I well might pardon it, for there was another in Palestine—Abdallah his name, and a Monk-Knight, too, of such resemblance to Gonzales, that scarce his friends could tell them separate. Wherefore this question, dear countrymen of Auvergne, I know not; but believe me when I say, oft have I slept in the same tent, and battled at the side of this same Monk. It was he who, when the scimeter of the Saracer cut me to the shoulder-blade, saved my life, that I might vindicate his truth in fair Auvergne."

"A miracle!" a miracle!" shouted the fools of the village, for all villages have their fools.

"Ah! pardon me, Sir Monk!" said the graceful Zuleima, kneeling, and with a manner implying deep sorrow for the mischief she had so unintentionally created. "The first glance I obtained made me think that you were

my brother, but now I look again, I see my error; you are much darker than Abdallah—oh! yes, a good deal darker.”

“Then, if the one is so much darker than the other,” interposed a wise-acre of a country lawyer, scratching his head to stir up his addled brains, “how comes it—listen to this, ladies and gentlemen, it is an important point in the chain of evidence—how comes it, I say, if one is so much darker than the other, they could not be distinguished even by their friends?”

“Oh! that is it, exactly, Monsieur Renard,” said Rudolph, sneeringly, “and you have started an objection that would be unanswerable—only that you have not properly understood the question. They could be known well enough when together; but not when seen alone, could any one tell which was Gonzales or which Abdallah. Do you understand me now?”

“Most brilliantly explained,” said a multitude of voices. “Hurra! Gonzales and Rudolph for ever! The Countess is wrong: our morals are saved. Better one than the other.”

The cause of excitement over, the whole attention was directed to the condition of the Lady Ernestina, who had slowly recovered from her fainting fit, but who, finding herself too much exhausted to sustain the requirements of the hostess, was even then in the act of withdrawing, supported on the arm of her husband, and followed by Henriette and Zuleima. A gloom was thus cast over the entertainments of the evening; and finally, the guests overcome by *ennui*, and plenteously stuffed with food and wine, gradually departed: all, moreover, perfectly impressed—and that was the main point of interest at the chateau—that Abdallah was not Abdallah, but Gonzales, the preserver of the life of their little favorite Rudolph.

Left to themselves, their reunion with the long-absent strangers would have shed uninterrupted joy over their souls, had it not been for the condition of the Lady Ernestina, who had received a much more serious shock than had at first been apprehended. To what comments were passed without, on the strange scene which had taken place, they were not indifferent, merely because of the position they held as the head of society in Auvergne, and the necessity for sacrificing something to appearances, in a world made up of appearances and falsehood alone. But Rudolph, who it has been seen was well known to, and a great favorite with all classes of people in the neighborhood, had of himself taken great pains to ascertain the effect produced by the singular scene so publicly enacted at the chateau. The result of his indirect inquiries and close observations went to satisfy him that the whole affair, like the nine days' wonders of the fools of the present age, had to tally passed away from their recollection. He had sagacity enough to perceive, from the anxiety manifested by those who were immediately interested the precise footing on which Abdallah stood with the sweet wife of his friend, and indeed it could not well have been otherwise, for it will be remembered, he had been informed by Abdallah himself, that he was to espouse the Lady Ernestina—the Baron being supposed slain—on his return from the Holy Land. That he had done so, and that the evils had resulted which it has been shown did take place, his ready perception enabled him correctly enough to judge. It was this quickness of apprehension which, aware as he of course was, of the Baron's marital right, had led him at once to understand

the motive of de Boiscourt's injunction to secrecy in regard to the true name of the confessor Gonzales. This, also, it was, which had at once pointed out the important service he should render to all parties, by maintaining that he was not Abdallah. Rudolph was the soul of truth where it concerned himself. To depart from it, where a woman's honor required the sacrifice, was virtue. His education in the school of chivalry had not been left imperfect.

Meanwhile, the Lady Ernestina became daily more fond of Abdallah; while his tenderness for her found, in his new character of confessor, a thousand different occasions of being manifested. The madness of passion had passed away. The more exquisite calm of ripe affection remained, and the one acquired greater force from the absence of the other. Their feeling had a pungency known only to the refined and intellectual. To gaze into each other's eyes, and read there all that was being enacted by the imagination, had a thousand times more of blissful enjoyment in it, than actual possession could yield to the merely sensual. Even in possession, it was not so much the gratification of desire that constituted their happiness—their most exquisite felicity—as it was the charm of voluptuous thought, arising from that possession. The mere fact was nothing in the scale of comparison—it was the knowledge—the reflection of the soul's confidence, which was mutually reposed—the utter surrender, as it were, of the identity of each to the other—the very assurance that God himself inspired them with the sublime feelings which they gloried in attributing to Him—these were the sentiments that most impressed them, and infused such voluptuousness into their veins, that even thus, they could have calmly exhaled their souls in death. Never had Abdallah and his friend loved each other more than at this period—each rejoicing in the joy of the other, and glorying in the greatness of mind of her who so could appreciate and impart it.

It was at this epoch, that the Baron de Boiscourt had ordered to be carved in ebony, by a leading artist of the day, the group of three figures which has been described in the opening chapter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ANOTHER month passed by. There was but one in that little re-union of friends who foresaw, in the future, sorrow as deep as the joy of the present was striking. This was Zuleima—the tender, the beautiful, the impassioned, Zuleima—who had been won to the Lady Ernestina in a manner the most irresistible. Often as she gazed upon her with an expression of the most touching tenderness, her eyes, while throwing herself upon the bosom of her whom she had learned to love with all the fervor of her Eastern heart, would fill with tears, until the Baroness, affected to the uttermost by the singular sympathy she manifested, would clasp her in her arms, and entreat her to explain the cause of her emotion. But

Zuleima, always anxious to avoid that explanation, only the more closely hugged her to her heart, and the more profoundly wept.

"Sweet Zuleima, you are very good to love me thus," said the Lady Ernestina one evening, after the fair Saracen had manifested more than usual feeling and emotion; "ah! believe me, I feel it deeply, and I too love you very much."

"And would you love me if you knew I had loved Abdallah, even as you have loved him?" she asked. "Would you love me, as you do now, if you knew that, taking pity on the madness with which his soul was filled for your beauty, I received him to my heart—to my arms, even while I made his lips pronounce your name. Tell me, Ernestina, my own beloved sister—the adored one of my noble brother—would you love me still, as you do now, were all this the case?"

"Is it so," said the Baroness, eagerly. "Oh, my sweet sister, come to my arms; ten thousand times better do I love you now; for you know my happiness; the secret has been revealed to yourself; you know his great love; you can enter into my soul, and trace all its most exquisite feelings. Ah, think of it! think of it!"

She drew her passionately to her heart. She covered her with kisses, and long were they locked within each other's arms.

"Do you know, dear Zuleima," said the Baroness, when the first passionate interchange of their feelings had been somewhat calmed, "I have a strong presentiment that I shall not live long. It seems to me as though this happiness were too exquisite to last."

The tears of Zuleima poured like a torrent down upon the heaving bosom of her sister; her heart was too full for utterance.

"Why do you weep, my beloved; why weep thus, my Zuleima?"

"I weep to hear you so calmly speak of death. Oh God, forbid!—and yet—and yet—oh, it must be so. I fear it!"

"God forbid! and you fear it! Dear Zuleima, by the love you bear me, explain all this. Your weeping—your prophetic thoughts—my own belief;—surely there must be something in all this. Come, tell me. I have tasted of such happiness as never yet fell to the lot of created woman, and although I am not anxious to dash the sweet cup from my lips, still I shall always be prepared to die, if such be my destiny, with the consciousness that I have quaffed of it as never yet woman quaffed. Yet wherefore die—and why apprehend it?"

"Ah, dear, dear sister!" said Zuleima; "do you recollect what occurred on the day of my arrival? Alas, I have not forgotten it. It has been a fearful source of disquiet to me since, for most surely I saw something poured into your ear by that bad woman."

"You do not utter but you look your meaning, dear Zuleima. You think still that it was done, and that the drops were poison. If so," she said, taking her hand, and pressing it affectionately, "why has it not shown itself before. True, I am very languid; but that may be owing to another cause;" and she glanced at the marked alteration in her shape.

"I have always avoided asking you one question," remarked Zuleima, as she imprinted a kiss of love upon her lips, "for I did not wish to alarm;

but now the moment has arrived when disguise and forbearance would be cruel. Do you ever feel a soothing sensation in the right ear?—yes, it was the right—and reaching from thence to the brain?"

"Yes, even at this moment, I feel it. It is delicious. It seems to steal one's very soul away in languor."

"Oh, my sister, summon all your courage," returned the sobbing Zuleima, as she sank on her knees, and throwing her arms around her, pressed her convulsively to her heart, "ere long you must die!"

"What, and leave Abdallah!" remarked the Baroness, mournfully. "Death is nothing in itself; but I cannot part with him. Where is he? Bring him to me, love, that I may entwine myself around him, even as the drooping vine embraces the majestic oak. Let me breathe out my last breath upon his bosom, dying even as we have so long lived, in the embrace that maddens. Oh, bring him, bring him quickly! Life is too short to be one moment from him."

Zuleima had buried her face in her hands. Her weeping was convulsive—her sobs were painful to hear.

"How long have I to live?" suddenly but calmly inquired the Baroness.

"Perhaps another month. If it be the poison I suppose, it is so gentle in its effect that it will not cause death in less than two months from the time when it is taken into the system. It is well known in the East, and chiefly used in the harem, by women jealous of each other. It causes no change in the person, and the death, which sure as fate ensues, is so gentle in its approach, that no one would ever suspect poison to have been taken. Beauty and health, and strength, and the power of enjoyment remain even until the last breath has passed away."

"This at least is consoling," said the lovely woman, rallying; "I would be beautiful in Abdallah's eyes to the last. Death is only to be feared in its loathsomeness. And yet I could live an age of love for him. But it shall be so. Zuleima," she said, pressing her fondly to her heart, "promise me one thing—that, until I am dead, you will not reveal this subject to any one. Pledge me, sweet sister."

"On my soul I will not!" answered the sobbing Zuleima. "Ah, that I had the power to avert your destiny. Would, indeed, I had never seen you, if only thus to know you and deplore your loss."

"My beloved sister, be calm. 'Tis well you came; let that console you. Had I not been warned, as now, death, sudden and unexpected, would have come to cheat me of the bliss I yet shall taste. Another month is left me; and in that month warm souls like ours can live another life of joy. Three days before my death the secret may be revealed. The loved ones besides Abdallah must be in some measure prepared. Is it not strange I feel so calm—so indifferent to my death?"

"Ah!" remarked the sobbing Zuleima, "it is the very nature of the poison to lull the senses, and induce this apathy."

"Then was the Countess charitable, else had she chosen a more torturing death."

"Ah! not charity, but policy, dictated her conduct;" was the sad re-

ply of Zuleima. "That lingering, soothing, almost voluptuous poison leaves no trace."

"But wherefore brought she water to relieve me when I fainted? Had she designed to poison, methinks 'twere strange to give what might have proved an antidote!"

"It was cunningly devised," returned Zuleima. "She knew that she had been near you, and might be suspected. By tendering water it might seem a kindness. In every way this served her purpose. If not suspected of foul treachery, she gained the merit of a desire of service to her whose death she sought; and, if suspected, her own draining of the cup disarmed suspicion."

"Most cunning woman, truly; and yet, Zuleima, do you know I do not hate her for the act?"

Zuleima made no answer, but looked at her with an expression of deep surprise.

"I cannot hate the woman whom deep passion for Abdallah alone moves to crime against her rival. And yet I would not, even to preserve the life I am about to lose, that her art had triumphed."

"Her art?"

"Yes: that night Abdallah told me all. To the summer-house she led him, under pretence of confession. Once there, her true design was soon unfolded. She supplicated him to her joy. At this his soul, wedded to my own and constancy, revolted. Irritated at his refusal, she spoke of me and vowed that I absorbed exclusively his love. Disgusted with her wantonness he left her with contempt. You know what followed. She has revenged her wrong."

"Ah, what misery has resulted! Would to Allah that Abdallah had promised what she asked!"

"No, Zuleima, no! I can die, but I cannot share his love—least with the Countess of Clermont than all other women. Her beauty is too haughty—too insolent—too overbearing—moreover, in her amours she is known to have no delicacy. It is well as it is. Let no one know that she was my poisoner. Will you promise me that? My death must be attributed to never-ending love for Abdallah."

"Since you ask it, I promise," replied the affectionate Zuleima, in a tone of expostulation; "but indeed it is very wrong to let her escape the punishment of her crime."

"Zuleima, sweetest!" and she tenderly kissed her, "in this I must be obeyed; and now send Abdallah to me. You know the power of his love, and I rejoice that you, and you alone, do know it. I rejoice that you should know it, because you are a part of himself: and because, having known it, you will comprehend that which no one else can—the redeeming happiness of the month of life yet left to your dear sister. Forth from this room again I stir not. In his arms I would breathe out my last breath. Strange enough, but I have often wished that it could be so. And now, what was then my fondest wish is about to be realized."

One long embrace, and Zuleima departed to deliver her message, and soon the Confessor and his beloved were again alone.

Shall we dwell on the month that still remained to the Lady Ernestina. Prepared to die at the expiration of that time, her only anxiety was for the grief of those who, she well knew, would be struck down as by a tempest of desolation to the earth. A month is but a second in the calendar of such love as consumed both her Confessor and herself. The days passed rapidly by. Abdallah was never five minutes absent from her couch at a time—never more than an hour of the entire day and night. Their passion grew at every moment stronger from fruition, until finally it became a perfect delirium of the senses. It seemed to them that they had never sufficiently loved before; and even now the intense devotion of their souls seemed only half to meet the intensity of their desire. The raptures they tasted were not of earth—they were of heaven. Their depth and fulness had nothing human in them. They would have grown into each other if they could.

At length, and yet too speedily, came that fatal morning so full of woe and bitterness to all but herself. She reclined, negligently, almost voluptuously clad, upon a rich crimson ottoman. She was somewhat pale, and slightly, very slightly emaciated. Her eyes were full of a soft fire that fascinated the beholder, and the extreme clearness of her complexion, gave her almost supernatural beauty. Her friends were grouped around her, and these consisted of her husband, her lover, Zuleima, Henriette and Rudolph, who were greatly affected. Intentionally, and with a view in some degree to prepare them, she had announced that she felt alarmingly ill, and wished the presence of all at the side of her couch. This evidently induced apprehension, and all hastened to obey her summons.

"Nay, look not thus gloomily," she enjoined, "else you will unfit me for the duty I have assigned myself. If you but knew the luxury of feeling I now enjoy, you would not pity but envy me. My dear, dear friends," she continued, "I have long since been aware of my approaching end, but why afflict you sooner than was needful? Better far to die amid smiling and well-remembered faces, than have one's last few days of life embittered by the sight of grief in those a powerful and divine impulse tells me I shall yet behold again, where all the future is love and love alone. Nay, Henriette, my child—my pet; do not weep. You shall be de Boiscourt's wife; you long have loved him—and he —"

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed the agonized girl, "talk not of love to me, who, in you, love all that is dearest to me. Not Gonzales himself glories in you more than I have gloried—loves you more tenderly than I have loved."

Abdallah spoke not. He stood rigid as a statue. The pores of his forehead distilled drops of agony. He was almost suffocated with his emotion. The Lady Ernestina dead, or torn from him forever, filled his mind with horror. He could not even imagine so astounding an evil.

"I then," he exclaimed, fiercely, "have, in the fulness of my own might, destroyed you. But ha! the work is but begun—it shall be finished."

No one replied. The import of his words was evident. All knew the fact of that to which he alluded, but none had ever thought of giving expression to the observation.

A sudden idea occurred to the Baroness. "Abdallah," she said, "all this is for the best. None there are here who do not know or surmise the relations that exist between us; for, although not bold or regardless of appearances, I have not had art enough to disguise my feelings. Come nearer, Abdallah, my husband that was, and now my lover. This is your child: never could it have succeeded to the name and title of de Boiscourt. It was the growth of the sweet love that for months has consumed us. Had I given birth to it, its position would, in the eyes of the cold world, been one of disgrace. Better that it should die with me than survive to embarrass the generous, the noble de Boiscourt, whom once, made mad by you with overwhelming love, I so greatly wronged."

As she uttered these last words she held out her arms to the sorrowing Baron, who knelt at her side, and, passionately embracing her, shed many and bitter tears upon her bosom.

Unable to command his grief, or to hide the desire that even at that moment came over his soul, the Confessor had rushed from the room.

"Follow him, de Boiscourt; follow and comfort him. Say that the three days I have to live I devote solely to him. But one thing before you go, you must promise me. Henriette loves you. She is a dear and charming girl. I know your taste, and you may rely upon it, she is in person, ay, and in heart too, all you can desire. You must marry her within a month after I am in my grave."

"But, dearest Lady Ernestina!" exclaimed the sobbing Henriette, throwing herself at her feet.

"Not another word, sweet child, if you wish me to die happily. I desire that it shall be so. What says dear de Boiscourt?"

The Baron was too much absorbed in his grief to reply by words. He took both Henriette's hand and his wife's tenderly in his own, and pressed them silently but fervently to his lips.

"Where is Abdallah gone?" she inquired, after a pause of some minutes. Dear de Boiscourt find him. He may do himself injury. His emotion was very great. Besides," she said, significantly taking his hand, "you know I have three days of perfect health left to me yet."

"Ah, would they were years," said the Baron, vehemently, "and devoted to the same purpose. God bless you, my love, for ever and for ever. Certainly, as you say, we shall meet in Heaven. Who so weak as to doubt it?"

He enfolded her to his beating heart. He imprinted a last and chastened kiss of love upon her lips, and then hurried forth in pursuit of Abdallah.

It was not until a late hour that the latter returned. He was wild—haggard—looked much older—as though he had gone through years of suffering. The benevolence of his brow had fled—its expression was entirely changed. On the contrary, a halo of calm spread itself over the countenance of the Lady Ernestina—a voluptuous languor crept through

her veins. She was alone when he entered. One glance at the perfect abandonment of her whole being was sufficient.

"Three days of bliss, and we die together," groaned Abdallah. He rang the bell furiously, and Henriette appeared.

"Child," he said, "let refreshments be taken into the ante-room. Wine, plenty of Cyprus wine—whatever may stir the blood to madness—all manner of succulents. We have a feast of love to keep. Here is Semolé and I am Jove. Sweet Hebé, bring wine—bring nectar; bring anything—bring everything that will administer to our burning love.—Quick, quick; there is no time to lose. Come not in yourself, but place it in that ante-room. Ernestina! oh, my Ernestina!"

And before the gentle Henriette, so recently betrothed to de Boiscourt, had time to leave the room, in execution of his will, her cheeks were crimson with blushes as she saw him wildly rush into the willing arms of her he loved, heedless that another than themselves was there.

"There's blood upon your brow, dear Abdallah; how came this?" remarked the Lady Ernestina, after a long lapse of time devoted only to the stormy passions which rent their souls.

"It means," said Abdallah, hoarsely, "that you are revenged. But, come, dearest, talk not of the hateful past; let us live while we may in the present. There is no time to devote to others. Ernestina, my child, my love, my wife, my adored one—our days are numbered, and they are brief. Oh, pitying saints, but one week longer!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHEN, at the expiration of the last three days, which the Lady Ernestina and her Confessor had devoted so unceasingly to their love, the sorrowing party at the chateau had entered the nuptial chamber which has already more than once been described, and to which they went unsummoned, they found the former almost in the languor of death; and the latter, so far exhausted from the effects of a poison he too had swallowed, that he had only strength to watch over the last moments of his adored. The liquid he had taken was somewhat the same in effect with that administered to the Baroness, by the revengeful Countess of Clermont. Like that, it was eastern, and had produced the soothingness which had been so remarkable in the Lady Ernestina. The calm and benevolent expression of his features had returned, and there was a holy resignation—a repose of countenance, as he gazed intently on the beautiful form of her who would be soon hidden from his sight, that seemed utterly at variance with the intensity of the love he bore her. His hand was tightly clasped in hers, whose breathing was now low and faint, but whose eyes occasionally opened upon him with such an expression of resignation and gratified love, that all, aware of the manner in which the last moments

of her life had been passed, felt secret joy and exultation that seemingly nothing now remained to her to desire on earth.

"What can this mean?" asked de Boiscourt, anxiously. "Surely these are not the usual indications of disease. What has caused this?"

"Poison!" answered the Monk-Knight, solemnly. "Who tastes of the sweet narcotic that courses voluptuously through each vein, would kiss the hand of the murderer who gave it, not in friendship but in hate."

"But, dear Abdallah, what mean you, is there reason to believe that Ernestina is a victim of poison, and not of consumption, as she announced?"

"De Boiscourt," replied the Confessor, "you recollect the scene that occurred in your festive hall, and in memory of your proclaimed return from Palestine?"

"I do: what of that?"

"Then, do you not recollect the charge I made against the Countess of Clermont—that she had administered the slow but deadly drug?"

"Good God! what mean you, Abdallah?" returned the Baron, with a pale cheek, and faltering voice, as he advanced, and knelt at the side of his wife; "I do recollect the charge too well, but then she gave denial—proof of innocence."

"And yet she did it—even then had she done it."

"Ah!" groaned the Baron in deep agony; "had I been warned by you, dear Zuleima, then had this terrible evil been avoided."

"Reproach not yourself," answered the tender wife of Rudolph. "It could not be avoided. It was already done when I gave you notice. I knew it was in vain to seek a remedy. Only to the Lady Ernestina did I disclose my fears. Ah! with what sublime courage she bore the tidings of the death that was so near. Nay, even she forgave the Countess, and won my pledge that I would not betray her guilt."

"And did she pray forgiveness of the Countess?" said Abdallah, wildly; and yet with his gaze still bent upon the beloved and dying one.

"She did. She said she could not hate the woman, whose strong desire alone for him she loved, had made her seek her life."

"Said she so?" fiercely exclaimed Abdallah. "Oh! what an angel, and what a fiend who tore her from my too insatiate love! You see blood upon these hands," he continued furiously, as he held them forth. "Well have I avenged her fall. Not hell itself could devise a fate more horrible than that which now is hers."

"Abdallah, my dear friend, you rave," said the Baron, endeavoring to soothe him. "You have not left the chateau once these three weeks; nay, except to take a portion of the food which was placed in the ante-room at your desire; not once have you been absent from the confessional."

"Ha!" returned the Monk-Knight, fiercely; "you are right—I rave. Let me then, for the few hours I have yet to live, tell you how I rave. See—see, she turns her eyes in supplication on me—her glances tell of the opening beatitude of her spirit. Oh! Ernestina, go not yet. Without you the world is hell. I must die in your embrace, straining you to my iron-breast until the very heart-strings snap asunder, and bear us away in the very tumult of our love to life eternal, where enjoyment is for evermore with

those who love like us. Dear, sweet Ernestina!" and he devoutly knelt and kissed her still warm lips; "never man loved as I have loved—never woman drank into her loving and fond soul the intoxicating sweets of passion as you have done. Oh! mercy, can it be? Is it, indeed—is it but a dream? Must it end? Damned—damned Countess! Ha! she lives—she breathes—the gangrene thought is at her heart! She lives to know each moment of my life is consecrate to hate of her accursed self. Speak, dear Ernestina, speak: one last embrace of love, and then, let all things perish."

The Baroness could not answer, but she cast a dying look of such deep love upon him, while she gently pressed his hand, that the strong man wept like a child.

"Oh! damned, damned woman!" he pursued, again relapsing into fury, "could nothing stay your cruel purpose? Would that I had yielded to your lewdness—ay, even though my soul had been covered with the bitterness of death in the act, before the fiend of hatred dire had entered into your heart to crush so sweet a flower. But I have revenged you. Listen, de Boiscourt," he said sternly, "it was fate, it was providence interfered to punish her infamy and avenge the lost one."

"When I went forth from this," he continued, "on the announcement of her danger being made, it was with madness and desperation of purpose at my heart. A wild desire to taste the breeze of heaven, and wring sad comfort from the stings of fallen hope oppressed my soul. I knew what I was about to lose, and horror was in the thought. My feet wandered most unconsciously to the summer-house. As I was about to pass it, the sound of voices from within arrested me. I felt that one at least was not unknown, and I stopped, mechanically, to listen. A vague presentiment that I was in some degree interested in the conversation, compelled me, as it were, to an act which otherwise I should have considered discreditale.

"If you recollect, there is a slight rise just behind the summer-house, where it borders on the thick skirt of the forest. I placed my foot on this, and thus elevated, easily looked in at the window. I sickened at the recollection of what I saw; it was the brutal Cœur-de-Fer in the arms of the Countess of Clermont. There was no doubt of the nature of their intimacy. Nothing was left to the imagination. Oh! I cannot find language to express the loathing which I felt at the sight. In my view she was perfectly unwomanized. I could as soon have mated with a she-bear, as with that shameless fiend.

"As I was about to descend, and plunge still deeper into the forest, almost humiliated at the thought that such love as I had witnessed was even the same in reality with that which bound me to the dying beloved of my soul, I felt humbled, annoyed, disgusted, and I hated the Countess with a hate no language can convey. While about to descend, I repeat, I heard her distinctly say, although in a voice broken by her recent detested emotion:

"And is the poison sure? it seems to me to work but slowly."

"A thousand thoughts crowded in one upon my brain, but uppermost rose apprehension connected with the idol of my soul—I lingered—listened."

"Its effect is certain—slow, but sure. I purchased it in Palestine to

administer to the accursed Monk-Knight, but never found occasion. I have preserved it carefully since. Two drops in the ear produce certain death.'"

"Oh, God! who can understand what I felt. To lose thus the woman that I loved with a love indescribable, who was more myself than myself; for whom I would have shed my blood, drop by drop—to possess whose superhuman beauty, I alone lived and breathed and found pleasure in life; and for whose possession I nursed the most inordinate and unsatisfied longing when most possessed. To lose her, to be certain as the sun of heaven that rolled over my distracted head, that she must die, and rot, and become a thing of leatherniness for worms to revel in, all this was more than madness—a world of time passed before me. The summer-house turned around. The trees of the forest seemed to stand with their roots in air. A flood of crimson sparkles shot forth from my staring eyes—my heart fainted with fear—I scarcely breathed. Again I made an effort to remove or confirm my strong suspicion, and again the damned and harshly grating voice of the Countess of Clermont arrested my ear."

"And yet nearly two months have passed since I poured it into her ear. Still she seems not even to suffer from the effect. You have mocked me, Cœur-de-Fer, to gain your end. I pine for this Abdallah, and fain would have her die, that her image being absent, nothing may interpose between me and the accomplishment of my desires.'"

"But even were she dead, how will that advance you? The Monk has no eyes—no soul, but for her. The Baroness in her grave will be dearer to him far than all of womankind beside her."

"I know him better,' was the rejoinder. 'Take from him that lap of love, on which his madness riots—destroy the creeping flesh, to which he, like the vampire clings, and soon his passion must find the fellow of the joy of which he has been robbed. Mark me well. I shall take the occasion when his mood is strongest to win him to my will. My charms, at least, are equal to those of her whose death I seek. If he but beholds them as even now you do, my conquest is complete. The man is all-powerful within him. Despite even of himself he must yield. Once mine, I doubt not my power to transfer the boiling love he now lavishes on my rival to myself.'

"Then despair not,' answered the brute. 'She may live another week, not more. Recollect, my Countess, it is not this alone contents me. Your love, pardieu, is sweet enough, but the thousand crowns are sweeter. Excuse my frankness, but we soldiers are generally straight-spoken fellows.'

"The day after her death is made known to me, the thousand crowns are yours,' resumed the harlot; 'but you have said you have another powerful poison, which causes death within a shorter period, and is more potent if taken inwardly.'

"I have brought it with me," said Cœur-de-Fer. 'The price is fifty crowns.'

"Then, ere you leave give it to me. Just fifty crowns are in my purse. You say that its soothing influence is equal to the first, but that it sooner kills.'

"It does. A few drops of any acid taken while it lingers in the system, produces death within the hour.'

"Good; there is my purse. If that you doubt the sum contained in it, pray count the crowns. For me, my longer absence may create suspicion, and I must hence at once. Farewell."

"Presently, fair Countess. I'll count the crowns before you go, and if, perchance, the sum is short, why I know where to call upon you for the remainder. We, old Palestine warriors," he continued, grinning hideously, "are fellows at a bargain, whether in love or in gold. You'll find the Monk a lover cheaply purchased at a thousand crowns though. I wish you joy of him. He would surely have killed the Baroness if you had not. Living in the chateau as I do, I know all that passes within it. Gonzales, by which name he now goes, has not once within the month passed the threshold of her confessional which adjoins her chamber. Little do they think how soon their love-feast will cease. Ha! that is my revenge!"

"Oh! what were my feelings? Is it possible for any other man to understand them? My finger-nails sank into the flesh of my convulsively closed hands. I was tortured with fierce impatience. I died to see her depart. Ah! joy, she went at last. She stole cautiously through the forest—she beheld me not. A mountain weight fell from my breast; I sank on my knees, and, with a gush of tears, thanked the great God who thus had indirectly befriended me."

"Soon afterwards the mutilated villain came forth gloating with satisfied sensuality and avarice. I was glad to see this; I loved that life should have a charm—a value in his eyes. He stood before me. It was the first time we had met, since he had conducted the Lady Ernestina and myself to the subterranean chambers. I know not what he read in my countenance, but he looked pale, and ill at ease when he first beheld me—even afterwards; he attempted to put on a bullying air, but it would not do. He drew a poignard and held it threateningly in the only hand that was left to him. I felt as though a child had been before me, and I laughed in derision. There must have been something hideous in the expression of my countenance at the time, for I could feel every nerve playing convulsively, and I saw that he was fascinated—spell-bound by the singularity of my manner."

"And so you deal in poison?" I said calmly.—"That which you had purchased for me you have sold to the Countess of Clermont—nay, deny it not, villain—I have it from your own lips: just now, you sold her more for fifty crowns. The price is in your gaberdine."

"He was evidently confused, and yet he sought to make the most of his position."

"By what right, Sir Monk, pretend you to interfere between a lady and her lover?"

"Oh! yes, the right—I understand. But then, you know, you desire me, the Lady Ernestina being dead, to follow in the path which your loathsomeness has traced. Have I not right then to regard you as a rival, and interfere accordingly?"

"The calmness with which I uttered these words astonished even myself. Cœur-de-Fer made no reply."

"Fiend of hell!—agent of a polluted devil, wearing the adored form of womanly beauty!" I resumed, after a short pause, and with almost sepulchral

voice—'better had you never forced your way from your mother's womb, than lived to see this day. Do you see my fingers' ends—mark how convulsively they play—see how they manifest impatience to clench themselves in your throat. Come, then, to your fate—follow me. I would not strangle you before this portal.'

"My eyes looked into his soul.

"Like the trembling bird, fascinated by the serpent, he dropped the hand which held his knife, and followed me. A spell was over him. He could not resist. I saw the giant turn pale. His knees trembled as he walked. Had he been the devil, I think I should have compelled him to my stern will.

"We were now about twenty paces from the trap-door leading to the subterranean apartments.

"'Lift that door,' I commanded, calmly, but in the tone of strong determination.

"'What do you intend to do?' he asked in trembling accents, and quailing with fear.

"'Lift that door,' I repeated in a voice of thunder.

"I must have looked more terrible than ever, for he gazed into my face with increased horror in his own. The brushwood was removed—the ring found, and the top lifted from the entrance.

"'And now,' I said, in a more subdued tone, 'what does not that man deserve who could find it in his heart to destroy so sweet and so pure a being as the Lady Ernestina de Boiscourt?'

"He was silent.

"'In taking her life, you have taken mine; yet what is my life when compared with hers? Oh! God,' I pursued, 'that one so lovely, so unoffending, should have had her days cut off by such a thing as this! It is a dream. I cannot believe it. It is too horrible—too incredible!' and I groaned in agony of spirit.

"After a pause of a few moments, I resumed—

"'Pray while you can, for you surely die the death of the damned.'

"His agitation increased—he trembled violently. Still filled with the instinct of self-preservation, he again raised the knife, and assumed an attitude of hostility.

"'Fool!' I muttered sneeringly, 'what hope you to do with this?'

"I caught his arm, and wrung the weapon from him as easily as I should have taken it from the grasp of a child. I flung it into the cavern.

"'Ah! pardon,' he cried, raising his solitary hand in supplication; 'if you hope for mercy hereafter, pardon—I cannot die here, as I should have died upon the battle-field. In memory of the Cross, and of Palestine, pardon. I cannot die—I am not prepared to die!'

"'Ah! joy,' I exclaimed; 'repeat that admission—it soothes my soul. Let me see you suffer the torments of hell even before you reach it. Ernestina, beloved and dying mistress of my soul, let me thus avenge you!'

"I approached him slowly—my eye was rivetted upon him. He could not even make an effort to escape. Gradually my open palms clutched his brawny neck. My pressure was slow but vice-like. More and more compressed became my hand at each moment; his hair seemed to stand on end;

the blood filled up the dark and swelling veins of his brow; the eyes, red and swollen, were soon like glassy and protruding balls without expression. Oh! he was horrible to look at, and yet I loved to look upon him, as I should have loved to gaze upon a beautiful picture, for I felt that I was offering atonement for the wrongs of my beloved, and every pang inflicted upon her murderer was one atom taken from the load of my own heavy affliction. At last, with the rattles in his throat, he fell; but death had been too merciful to him. I did not intend it. Lifting him in my arms, I dashed him with all my strength to the bottom of the cavern, and replaced the trap-door, which I carefully covered as before.

"Horrible, yet most just fate!" sighed de Boiscourt. "Well—well indeed, had he deserved it."

"Horrible enough," remarked the Monk-Knight, calmly; "and yet it was mercy compared with that of the accursed Countess."

All shuddered, but no one offered a remark; and thus, the Monk-Knight continued:

"My vengeance was yet only half complete. I hastened to the Bishop's mansion at Clermont. I asked for the Countess. She was in. She had just returned from her damnable appointment with *Cœur-de-Fer*. I sent up my name, with a message that I had come to confess her. I knew what inference she would draw from this, for I have had experience enough to know that when one of that brotherhood—whose vices had once filled me with horror—sent to a woman a communication of this kind, it was intended to convey that another should be added to the sins for which he gave her absolution.

"Promptly was I admitted into her boudoir. She was there. My soul was filled with loathing for the wretch, and yet I dissembled. There she sat or rather reclined—that gross and sensual woman—still flushed and reeking from the arms of *Cœur-de-Fer*. As I wanted the poison she had obtained from *Cœur-de-Fer*, it was essential that I should play the hypocrite. I did so. Oh! how I loathed myself for it. I pretended that she had guessed right as to my passion for the Lady Ernestina, but that now my feelings had entirely changed, that I had become sated with her possession and desired her. That in order to effect this with security, it was necessary to put the Baronesse out of the way; that I had some poison, but wanted more, with which she must immediately supply me.

"Unsuspectingly, she went to the spot where she had deposited that which had purchased from *Cœur-de-Fer*, and handed it to me with a meaning smile.

"There is death in that within the twenty-four hours," she exclaimed, "then am I yours, without interruption, and for ever? But oh! I cannot wait until then. First, let me indulge, and then impose penance upon the overwhelming love I bear you."

"She was partly undressed. She caught me by my robe, and drew me to her side on the couch, manifesting a passion so unfeminine that my disgust increased. With a cold, calm eye, I surveyed the charms she forced upon my attention. They might have found favor in the eyes of another: in

mine, they were hideous. The infamy of the mind had destroyed all beauty.

"‘Not here,’ I said coldly. ‘Forgive me if I am weak enough to have some scruple. I cannot desecrate the confessional. The night is waning. Go forth, even as you are, and we will seek the cover of the forest. That ample cloak and cavalier’s hat will sufficiently disguise you: it looks, indeed, as if it had been often used for the same convenient purpose—perhaps this very night,’ and I looked fixedly at her.

"‘By all the saints of Paradise!’ swore the lying woman, ‘hence I have not stirred this night.’

"‘By all the fiends of hell, you have!’ I responded savagely, striking my hand heavily, at the same time, on a table that stood near.

"‘She started, looked surprised, but answered not.

"‘Nay, nay,’ said I, calmly; for I felt that I had committed myself—‘think not that I mind those little infidelities. You know the man is strong within me, and heeds not of the woman, but her sex. What care I, though a score of others feed upon the dish of which I taste. But come—I have a great fancy for de Boiscourt’s summer-house. The air is cool, the scene is still, and fashioned most to love—perhaps to crime.’

"‘And where is that?’ she asked.

"‘Nay, nay, sweet innocent, you do but jest. Even where the love you deign to offer me was first bestowed upon the menial, Cœur-de-Fer, and that within this hour. A good and proper man is Cœur-de-Fer, and one well fitted to a lady’s taste. But come, fair Countess, let me don your cloak. Ah! there, you look most bravely. That hat and plume right well becomes you. Come quickly—my ravishment of joy at what awaits us both will scarcely keep within its bounds.’

"‘Nay, dear Monk,’ she expostulated, ‘why to the forest of Auvergne? See you not here all to warm the soul to sweet desire? Ah! do not go, I pray you. It will be too late before I can return.’

"‘Late enough,’ I muttered fiercely, and between my clenched teeth. ‘Come—come,’ I continued more calmly; ‘Come, wed you to your future mate. The love that is in reserve for you never had its parallel.’

"‘I grasped her arm rudely: I made her follow me. My steps were hurried but measured. She had some difficulty in keeping up with me. At length, and in silence, we reached the summer-house.

"‘Not here,’ I observed, as I saw her about to enter. ‘There is a spot hard by, so suited to the purpose, that nature herself will be startled at what shall be enacted there.’

"‘I now could perceive from her hesitation, that she began to entertain some slight distrust of my purpose. I threw off the mask: its load was insupportable. I dragged, rather than led, her to the trap-door.

"‘What,’ I said to her fiercely, ‘do you repent your promise?—come, come.’

"‘We were near the entrance to the subterranean passage. I lifted the trap-door.

"‘Fiend!’ I said, pointing to the cave, ‘the court of love is there.’

"‘She looked down—the place was black as Erebus.

"Ah! I fear—I tremble—I know not what to think—it appals me."

"Nay, the place is meet, most meet, for tender lovers like ourselves," I hoarsely whispered. "Come, my impatience cannot wait: I have not time to waste in empty words."

"I stood upon the third step leading to the cavern. Her hand was in mine. I drew her downwards with a strong arm. She uttered a loud shriek, and my impatience redoubled. I had been well tutored how to act in that abyss of darkness; I had provided a dark lantern on my way to the residence, and this I now lighted.

"The murky gloom gave to the place the appearance of a pandemonium.

"Oh, God! where am I?—what do you intend to do? Good Heaven! who is that?"

"That," I said sternly, still retaining my firm grasp of her hand, "is one you ought to know. Look at him well, murderess. Of a verity he is a handsome rogue, and much improved since he dallied in your arms this day. Look well at him, I say."

"Holding the light low, I pressed her head downward also. She could not but recognize the features, horribly distorted even as they were. Oh! happiness to myself; he was not dead; he still breathed and moved.

"That is your lover," I remarked, calmly. "I have brought you here, not to wed with me, but with him.

"The Countess now began to comprehend the full extent of her position. She uttered piercing shrieks, which I feared might be heard from without.

"In the violence of my hate and rage, I damned her, and struck her on the lips. The blood gushed forth upon my hands, and so filled her mouth that she could not repeat her cries.

"Now woman—accursed woman," I muttered through my closed teeth, "know that I have entrapped you to your destruction. Never again shall you behold the sunlight of God's heaven. In bitterness and in anguish, worse than death, shall you pay the penalty of the black deed which, to gratify the wishes of a devil, has robbed me of an angel—ay, basely killed the sweetest flower that ever shed its sweetness on a lover's breast. Yes, inhuman wretch, envenomed toad, upon whom I spit, I know it all. I know you purchased poison, and poured it in the ear of her I loved, entailing certain death. But I have no time to deal in scolding words. You have destroyed two glowing hearts, that God had knit in holiest love together. You have quenched two fires, that but for your vile art and practice had been unquenchable; but I am revenged. This is your fate. Let the worms that crawl from the vile body of your confederate in blood, pander to and sting you in your lewdness. There is your loathsome lover, cling to him. See, there is breath in him yet. Try your Jezebel arts upon him. Renew his life and vigor that he may, for once again, minister to your wicked will, but so feebly as to leave the craving deathless at your heart while life remains. And think, while life remains to you, that thus the Lady Ernestina is revenged."

"I threw her on the damp earth—I spat upon her as upon a toad, then placing the lantern on the ground, drew from beneath my monkish garb strong thongs I had prepared for the purpose. I lashed her, struggling to

free herself and howling in her despair, face to face with Cour-de-Fer, and uttering curses upon them both, consigned them to their fate.

" 'All this may seem cruel, unparaly,' he continued, after a pause; 'but who, like me, has suffered—who, like me, has had each fibre of his heart torn asunder!—who, like me, has lost an Ernestina? The damp dungeon the Countess now inhabits would be paradise, were *she* but spared to share it with me. Ah, what is this love, this tremendous emotion, this remarkable desire—what is it, I ask, if it be not a portion of the Divinity—a part and parcel of God himself, who is all love. Were it not so, the mere possession were sufficient to ensure the perfect joy. But it is not *that*—not possession a thousand-fold repeated—but the subtlety of pleasure that kills with languishment, and mystery, and delight. All this have I felt, all this do I acknowledge; for God made man and woman in original beauty and power, that most they might evince their adoration and gratitude for the mysterious and divine boon, and if, while degenerating themselves, they have suffered passion to degenerate into mere animal desire, it is by reason of the depravity, which has been the growth of civilization and its consequent crime. As first given to man it is the essence of purity itself.

" 'There was a time,' pursued the Monk, who spoke with great solemnity and emphasis, and feeling, 'when I thought differently—when the book of knowledge of the divine goodness was closed to me. I had not known woman—I had not learned the fulness of God's love to man by her creation. But ah! it is vain to think or speak of these things. The cup of deep human joy has been exhausted, de Boiscourt; my soul thanks you for the lesson you have taught me even in the arms of your adored wife. Ernestina! oh Ernestina,' and with a will groan, he sank at her side, once more and forever.

" 'Abdallah, dear Abdallah,' murmured the enfeebled voice of her whom he mourned, and who had only awakened from a delicious reverie, in which visions of future love and existence with him were uppermost—'give me your hand.'

" She pressed it faintly yet fervently to her lips, muttered a few cheering words, raised her blue eyes to his, while a rich glow tinged her cheek, sank her head upon her bosom, and breathed her last, looking in death as beautiful as in life.

" 'So, so—even so,' said Abdallah, wildly; 'then the dream is over. I cannot weep—my tears are dried: yet who shall separate us?'

" Taking suddenly from his breast a small vial, he applied it to his lips, then threw himself prostrate upon the body, around which he firmly entwined his arms. When de Boiscourt, seeing all was over with the Lady Ernestina, approached for the purpose of gently removing the Monk-Knight he too was dead."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Long and deep was the sorrow that reigned in the chateau of Auvergne, after the melancholy deaths of the Monk-Knight and the Lady Ernestina. A heavy and annihilating blow had been struck upon the hearts of their friends, and for a season deprived the almost stultified mind of the power of reaction. For months all within was even as a desert. The deepest mourning had been ordered by the Baron for his immediate household and retainers, and many and reverential masses, at which the family solemnly assisted, were said for the repose of the souls of the deceased. No one spoke to the other of the departed, but it was clear to all that the mind of each was absorbed in reflections, springing not only from the intensity of their ill-concealed love, but from the sad events which had followed its obstruction.

Time, however, which a wise dispensation of the Holy One has willed to soften and allay the most terrible of all griefs incident to man, accomplished its usual task, and gradually the recollection of the loved and regretted was accompanied by a soothing and subdued regret that was rather melancholy than painful. Then, for the first time, they began to live again in themselves and for each other. Hitherto not a word relating to the engagement exacted for their happiness by the Lady Ernestina, had been uttered by de Boiscourt to Henriette, but now that the tension of their grief-devoted feelings had been in some degree relieved, the heart felt doubly impelled to tenderness and love.

"Henriette, dearest," said the Baron, as they sat alone on the eve of their marriage, in the moonlight, which cast its pale rays through the opened lattice of the Lady Ernestina's long unoccupied boudoir—"the past seems to me to have been a dream, in which I had forgotten not only myself—that were nothing—but the dear bequest so generously bestowed by her whose memory we yet mourn, as the best and sweetest of womankind. Pardon me, dear Henriette, if my lips have not spoken the love I now most deeply feel for you."

"And had you, de Boiscourt, spoken to me earlier, the illusion would have been destroyed. I could not have justified my love for him who could so soon tear from his heart the image of such a wife as her, the friend I deeply loved myself—ay, with all the love a man could entertain."

"Some words escaped her once, when, strange she hated me," said the Baron, as he enfolded the animated and ardent girl to his throbbing heart, "which then perplexed, but now enlighten."

"And these were?" queried Henriette, as, leaning forward, she looked up into his eyes.

"That often in your arms, love, and before the Monk-Knight's visit to Auvergne, she had sighed her soul forth to him in passionate desire."

The cheek of the young girl became crimson. She dropped her eyes beneath their long dark lashes, hid her face on his bosom, but replied not.

"I understand it all, dearest," said the Baron, as he pressed her fondly to his heart. "In the strong excitement of your feelings, you with words of fire called up the image of Abdallah before her glowing sense, while she, not generous less, fed the young passion you had conceived for me. Say, sweetest, is it not so?"

Still Henriette was silent, but the heaving of her bosom against his own, and the increasing and involuntary closeness of her embrace, satisfied the Baron that he had correctly surmised.

"Tell me," he pursued, tenderly, and filled with a desire to obtain a full avowal from her own lips, of the passion she had never admitted to him, "that it was not because it was the wish of the dear Ernestina that you should be my bride, that you have consented to become such."

"Ah, my own heart too fully responded," she murmured. "I long have loved you, de Boiscount. Before you left for Palestine my heart was yours. And much as I adored the dear Lady Ernestina, my love for her was the greater, because she had been filled with yours. But, even without that, there was something so superhuman in her loveliness that—ah! I cannot speak it," she continued, burying her face more deeply on his chest.

"Tell me, love—tell me all you felt, all you thought. What bond so sweet as confidence between those who truly love! Tell me, dearest, I implore you—you know you are to be mine—my wife, to-morrow."

"So deeply I loved her beauty—with such passion," she returned, assuming a sudden courage, and raising herself up to gaze, still blushing, into his face, "that I wished myself Rudolph to supply the absence of her lord."

"You did!" exclaimed de Boiscount, with an emotion he had yet never manifested since the death of the Baroness, and clasping Henriette convulsively in his embrace, "what a gift has she bequeathed to me. Now, then, I love again—the desolation of my heart is gone, for Ernestina yet survives in the mind and person of her friend and pupil."

"All the fondness that one woman could lavish upon another," pursued the open-hearted and generous girl, "we exchanged. Oh! what passion—what fervent, yet endearing passion, glowed in the soul of the preceptress to whom I owe all of love I ever felt. Sweet, sweet were the words of tenderness that, spoken through me to the strong image called up to her mind, came as from an angel. What she said I knew must be right—what she did I knew must be good. Yes," she continued in a tremulous murmur, "when lying at my aide, with loosened hair, which she permitted so to remain, because it was passion to behold it in all its fulness and beauty—her features calm, and holy, and serene, even as were Abdallah's, and her eyes filled with a humid fire that told all the softness of her soul—nay more—for why should I hide it from him who wears my fullest confidence, when excited with adoration of the warm, glowing heart of her who seemed utterly unconscious of her own transcendent charms, I bared with trembling hands, her beauteous form, and found those the perfection of God's crowning work of loveliness, no language can tell the emotion of my heart—the deep and unselfish love that filled my soul for her."

"Strange, strange, yet most adorable girl," said the Baron, as again he pressed her madly to his heart.

"I have said that I wished myself Rudolph," she resumed, blushing, yet averting not her gaze from his, "Oh! this was not for my sake, but hers. For myself I cared not. To look upon her was to me sufficient. To feast my eyes upon her beauty was all I asked for myself; but I would have fain possessed the power to renew in her those sweet sensations which knowledge made so necessary to her happiness. Had I had a lover whom I loved to madness, my greatest joy had been to see him, not my own, but drawing from that heavenly form, those languor-beaming eyes, and that voluptuous bosom, the fulness of the enchanting love that wanted in her soul."

"Incomparable girl!" said de Boiscourt, half wild with passion, "I never knew you until now. Oh! Ernestina, blessed Ernestina," and he raised his clasped hands to heaven. How I love her, even for her very love for you. Say, sweetest," he continued, addressing the agitated Henriette, "even in the fulness of our love we will think of her, shall we not?"

"Oh! yes, de Boiscourt, yes," she murmured—"no love so sweet as that which her cherished image sanctifies and approves. Not dearer to yourself is her memory than to me. Could I call her back to earth this hour, to taste once more the cup of happiness, freely would I consent to yield you to her—and yet, de Boiscourt, not slight is the love I bear you."

"Each word you utter enters into my soul, like a new-enkindled passion," exclaimed the excited de Boiscourt. "Kill me, torture me with the happiness to feel that there is one yet living, so like in thought unto myself, that scarcely seem we separate. Your words, far more even than your exceeding beauty, seduce my soul. I love, adore that woman beyond all human precedent, who so confides, before the marriage hour, in him to whom she yields her all."

"Nay, what merit in that?" said the still blushing and generous girl. She loves but weakly—has poor opinion of her lover's honor, who would bury in her secret heart, the day preceding the fulfilment of the nuptial rite, that which she pines for the morrow to unfold."

"In all things are you still myself, dearest love. 'Tis rank hypocrisy in the maiden of to-day to seem ignorant in the eyes of the man who is to be the future partner of her life, of that which she will admit as the wife of to-morrow. Dear, dear Henriette, your feelings, your sentiments, madden me in their likeness to my own; to-morrow is an age asunder from the present; I cannot wait for it."

The passion which her strange yet endearing admissions had been gradually raising, now knew no bound. He caught her to his heart, he imprinted passionate kisses on her lips, and while exciting her, not more by his caresses than by his burning words, bore her fainting in his arms to the nuptial-bed, hallowed by the endearments which so often had been exchanged between her and the mistress she so loved.

There was no upbraiding—no struggling—no reproaching—no hypocrisy with her who knew that she was to be a wife in name even on the morrow. She made no attempt to arrest her own confiding love, as with envious eyes he surveyed the drapery that veiled the beauty of her whom he regarded already as his wife. One image, it was a vivid one, he painted to her imagi-

nation, in glowing language. The tender and voluptuous Henriette trembled as she heard it. Throwing her arms around his neck, and answering his eager kisses from her moist and swelling lips, her embrace, if not so eager, was yet unpassioned as his own.

"My own voluptuous wife," he exclaimed fiercely, in the agony of the thought that she was wholly his—

"My husband," she murmured—"oh! my husband."

"What a life of passion shall be ours," again remarked de Boiscourt, in the same tone.

Henriette could not speak—sobs of tenderness were her only answer.

"And all this glowing beauty shall be mine by rite of church to-morrow," said the Baron, gazing his soul through her half-closed eyes.

At that moment a heavy and uncertain footstep was heard crossing the floor of the boudoir, and presently the handle of the door of the bed-room was violently turned, but in so confused a manner that it was not until the lapse of nearly a minute, that it yielded to the trial. The door was unbolted, but even in this short interval Henriette and her husband had time to regain their composure, the former moving forward to ascertain who was there. The horror of both may be conceived, when, as the door flew open, the Countess of Clermont, pale, haggard, divested of all her former beauty, and wrinkled with seeming age, appeared with glaring eyes before them, her dress soiled and torn, her right and shrivelled arm uplifting a rusty knife-blade, which was pointed threateningly forward.

"Vengeance upon the fiend Monk!" she hoarsely cried, and foaming at the mouth—"death to his detested paramour!"

She struck frantically at the bosom of Henriette, who was too terrified at the apparition to think of her own danger, and had she not at the moment sunk swooning on the floor, not even the quick and impetuous action of de Boiscourt, who rushed forward to receive the blow intended for the affrighted girl, would have prevented the object of the enraged woman from being attained. As it was, the knife entered nearly an inch his own breast, and had certainly inflicted a more dangerous if not fatal wound, had he not rapidly thrown up his arm in defence. The rage of the Baron was terrible, not because of the injury inflicted on himself, but at the sight of the demon, who had not only destroyed one angel of love, but aimed at the extinction of another. What fiend of malice could have induced her thus to attempt the life of one who had never injured her even in thought, he was utterly at a loss to divine. This, however, was an evanescent reflection that passed like lightning through his mind. He did not give himself time to dwell either upon that or upon the incomprehensible fact of her re-appearance—his only care was to remove far from her dangerous presence her he loved. His first act, therefore, after viewing the wound was to wrest the knife from her grasp, then to gain time and freedom of action, by hurling her with violence against the opposite wall of the boudoir. He then caught up the fainting Henriette, and placing her upon the bed, bathed her temples with a stimulative essence which happened to be within his reach. As she gradually revived, he tenderly bade her to remain quiet, and then removing the key and locking the door on the outside, ap-

proached the body of the disgusting looking Countess, who, recovering from the violence of her fall, was in the act of rising.

Desirous of removing her, yet unwilling to come personally in contact with one whom he loathed nearly as much as Abdallah had, he rang the boudoir bell furiously for his servants. But vain and without result was the summons. Again and again he rang, but no one appeared. Unable to account for this singular conduct in his domestics, he opened the door of the boudoir leading upon the corridor, and called through the vacuum formed by the winding stairs from the top to the bottom, in a voice that resounded fearfully throughout the chateau. Nothing but echo responded to his call, and the mansion seemed deserted. At a loss what to do, the Baron was almost frantic. He could not descend to look for his people, leaving behind him the hateful and fearful enemy of his wife, whom she might reach and destroy before his return, and yet his repugnance to touch her was almost insurmountable. As he turned to re-enter the boudoir, the blood from his wound was now strongly marked upon his bosom. This, for the first time, attracted her notice.

"My hand lacked quickness," she muttered with a demoniac frown; "it was not that blood but hers—that of the odious, the hateful Baroness, for which my soul thirsted."

"Wretch!" said de Boiscourt, compressing more firmly his convulsively closed hand, "and was not one victim sufficient? Was not the poisoning of the noblest woman that ever lived on earth—the first Baroness de Boiscourt, sufficient, that you must glut your vengeance on the second?"

"What first—what second?" she said wildly. "Do you mean," she said sternly, yet anxiously, and attempting to place her hand upon him—a movement from which he shrunk with loathing—"that the first Baroness, the Lady Ernestina de Boiscourt, is dead?"

"Do you ask the question, murderess? even by your own damnable hand you know she died. It was you distilled the poison."

"And the Monk-Knight?" she questioned, wildly and hoarsely.

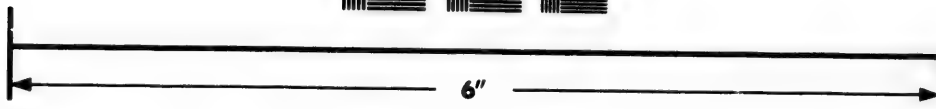
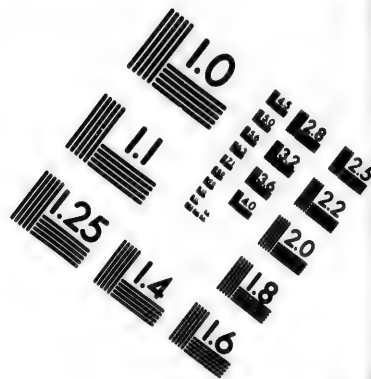
"What! pretend you ignorance? but I had forgotten: you come from the sepulchre in which he had buried you. What boots it to you to know that, even by the poison you gave him for your rival's more speedy death he perished and by his own hand."

"Ha!" she said, with a fearful exultation, "then I am revenged. Both are dead! The accursed lovers who filled my soul with hate no longer live to blast my sight with joy I might not share, and I am content. But say," she pursued eagerly, "who is the second Baroness? Blinded by my rage I distinguished not. I saw she was a woman, and being in your nuptial chamber, more frequently filled by Abdallah than yourself, I took for granted that I had disturbed them in their dalliance. Since neither you nor her then I distinguished in my erring judgment, who was she—this second Baroness de Boiscourt—whom, thinking her I hated, I sought to slay?"

"It can matter not to such as you," replied the Baron, scornfully—one to whom, being compared, you are even as a Hecate to a Hebé."

"And yet methinks," she replied, with savage triumph, her every





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feature distorted with the malevolence of her nature—"that your Hebé issued from the womb of a Hecate."

"What mean you, woman?" said de Boiscourt, eagerly, and paling as he spoke.

"I mean that I am doubly revenged if it be Henriette, and now, that I am somewhat composed, I am inclined to think it is. Know, Baron, whom now I hate nearly as much as those who with subtlety I have slain, that she who is called Henriette de Gaston is my daughter."

"Your daughter! God of Heaven, your daughter!" exclaimed de Boiscourt, with a look of horror. "I believe it not—the proof, the proof—I want the proof."

"Nay, Baron," retorted the Countess, glorying in her power of annoying him. "Was not Henriette left an orphan in infancy at the door of the chateau de Gaston, and did not the detested Baroness obtain her thence to bring her up even as her own child? She was mine, when I was scarce seventeen. To save my honor she was left there by her father."

"And who is her father? I never heard of him—not even that you had had a lover then. Who was he?"

"Can you not divine? I lived, you know, under the roof of the godly, the pious Bishop of Clermont. At sixteen I was a woman; at seventeen a mother."

"Surely you do not mean," said the pained and excited de Boiscourt, "to insinuate—"

"Not to insinuate," she interrupted, with indescribable and triumphant bitterness, "but to assert the father of Henriette is the most holy and reverend the most godly, the Bishop of Clermont, who stole my soul even before he seduced my body, and made me that which I have ever since continued to be. My child," she added fiercely—"the child of crime, the proud Baroness de Boiscourt, this is well! Now can I afford to lose in death the keen desire I mingle with my hate, for the memory of Abdallah. Ha!" she said, as suddenly she caught sight of the blood-stained knife, which de Boiscourt had thrown upon the floor of the boudoir. She stooped and seized it.

Immersed in his own strong and painful feelings, de Boiscourt had not noticed the action. At the same moment the sound of many feet were heard ascending the stairs. Distracted at what he saw and heard, the Baron turned to see who were the intruders. This was the occasion taken by the Countess to accomplish her purpose. The sound of her falling body caused him to turn and ascertain the cause, when to his dismay, and only *that* because he hated that she should choose that place to die, he saw that she had inflicted a deep wound under her left breast, and was bleeding fast. The knife she still grasped tightly in her hand, and fortunate it was, perhaps, that it was so, for just at this moment the party, whose footsteps had been heard, and some of whom were not particularly friendly to the Baron, entered the room, and witnessed the tragic scene. At the head of all was the Bishop of Clermont himself, holding a crucifix.

Distracted with his own feelings, dreading lest all this should reach the ear of the dear and innocent girl whom he still loved, despite of her unhappy birth and connexion, de Boiscourt was torn with anxiety to have the body

of the dying woman removed. Under the circumstances there was but one course for him to pursue, to have his purpose effected promptly. Calling the Bishop aside, he said a few low but energetic words in his ear. The Bishop turned red and pale by turns, and when de Boiscourt had ceased, he bade the domestics, who had brought up the rear, to form a litter of one of the long cushions of the ottoman, and carry her forthwith to Clermont, his own outer clerical habit having been thrown over to conceal the body.

Oppressed by feelings impossible to describe, the Baron, when they had departed, entered the chamber where Henriette was yet lying. The alarmed and fearful expression of her face assured him that she had heard all. She scarcely dared to look him in the face. The Baron was not slow to remark this. He threw himself upon his knees at the side of the bed and embraced her tenderly, exclaiming as he did so, and with deep feeling—"Perish the man who would cruelly and unjustly visit upon the innocent daughter, the sins of the mother, however infamous or steeped in guilt the latter. Henriette my beloved, look into the eyes—into the heart of your de Boiscourt. You are still his wife—in the eyes of God and man you shall remain so."

Her bosom heaved almost to bursting. She gave a loud and starting shriek, in which gladness and sorrow so blended, that it was difficult to say which predominated. She was overwhelmed, subdued with his generosity, and never did woman feel more devoted in the warmest affections of her heart than Henriette de Gaston, as her beloved husband raised and pillowed her aching head upon his generous, open, and manly breast.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE excitement that prevailed at Clermont and its immediate vicinity at the sudden apparition and tragic end of the niece of their pastor and most pious father in God, was very great. All knew that she had suddenly and unexpectedly disappeared; none knew positively how, although some had ventured to affirm that she had been seen to depart in the neighborhood of the forest with a tall and herculean monk, who much resembled the Confessor Gonzales; but as he had been known to perish a few days afterwards, that impression had been removed, and the whole affair was involved in mystery. As for the Bishop himself he was by no means sorry at the event, whatever the cause, which had rid him of the presence of a niece, whose gallantries in the neighborhood, and even under his own roof, were subjecting him to a scandal he little desired. His own intimacy with her had long since ceased, or rather was continued only at rare intervals; but he was in constant dread, lest that in some moment of unguardedness and imprudence, for which she was remarkable, she might betray the secret on which the preservation of her honor and his position depended.

When the Countess first appeared at the chateau de Boiscourt, in the strange and wild manner we have seen, and fiercely demanded where the

Baroness de Boiscourt was to be found, the terrified domestics scarcely doubting that they had seen the ghost of the departed woman, ran with all the speed they could command to the residence of the Bishop, whom they chanced to find alone and disengaged, and who, when informed of what facts they could relate, prepared to return with them, and exorcise the spirit, which all agreed in stating had entered the chateau at their departure. Immediately they set out, the Bishop fearing that in the state of mind ascribed to his niece, she should make such communication to de Boiscourt as would prevent him from fulfilling his engagement with Henriette de Gaston—the offspring of his guilty love—whom, in her assumed name and character, he was engaged to wed to the lord of the domain on the morrow. The scene he witnessed has already been described, and time had been afforded him to be present at this in consequence of the half-maddened and bewildered woman having consumed more than an hour in vain attempts to discover the private stair-case which led to the boudoir, and which alone had been used since the return of the Monk-Knight and the Baron from Palestine. The few words whispered in his ear by the latter on his arrival had been more than sufficient to satisfy him the danger he feared had occurred, and glad was he to withdraw and hide his confusion with the disgusting victim of his sensual and unholy passion. The Countess was placed in a room where no one had access to her but himself, and a favorite and trustworthy servant of his own immediate household. The wound the wretched woman had inflicted was mortal. Life was ebbing fast, and great weakness had subdued her fierce temper into something like calm. When a little more composed, she became sensible that her hours were numbered, and the pangs of remorse—the fear of dying even without hope—took possession of her soul. On the Bishop expressing a desire to know everything connected with her strange absence and stranger re-appearance, she narrated all, and then, after having confessed intrigues and adulteries, as numerous as her years, asked for and obtained absolution. After this she became more calm, and spoke of the bright destiny that awaited their child, whom in the blindness of her rage she had so nearly murdered. The Bishop shook his head, and repeating the words de Boiscourt had communicated to him, gave her to understand that her own indiscretion had spoiled all, since but for that the Baron would have known her only as the orphan Henriette de Gaston, but that it was impossible to suppose, the true fact of her birth and parentage being known, he would not discard her with ignominy from the chateau.

Suddenly on hearing this, the rage and disappointment of the dying woman resumed their empire. She rose in her bed with features still ghastly in the ferocity of their expression—tore her hair out by the roots—snatched the bandage from her wound, from which the dark, polluted blood gushed frothingly—and cursed and raved against her daughter, de Boiscourt, and her uncle. As the latter stooped over her to soothe her, she grasped him by the throat, and would have strangled him, but for her failing strength. Suddenly her eye became fixed—a deeper and bluish pallor overspread her face—her hands relaxed their grasp—one heavy sigh she gave that forced the blood in a stream from her gory breast, and then sank her head upon the pillow, and died.

It was a horrible sight. The pious Bishop of Clermont, for the first time, felt the keen stings of remorse, and he passed the night without sleep. At an early hour the next morning, he received from the Baron a summons to repair instantly to the chateau. He felt the influence he had lost—the forced absence of self-dignity, involved in this unceremonious demand for his presence. But he knew that he was in the power of the Baron, who would doubtless heap upon Henriette and himself every possible indignity. After giving instructions for the disposal of the body of the Countess, he went forth.

For two hours he remained closeted with de Boiscourt, and when he came forth, it was with tears in his eyes—the first that proud dignitary had ever been seen to shed—all who saw him marvelled at the sight, but none, of course, offered a comment: the assumption was, that they had been drawn forth by the dangerous condition of the Countess, for as yet none but de Boiscourt knew of her positive death.

When the interview of the Baron with the Bishop had terminated, he sought the chamber of the trembling Henriette. How differently are men constituted—how noble, and generous, and self-sacrificing, some hearts—how narrow and selfish are others! So far from the sweet girl losing power over the Knight, by the painful facts which have been made known, his love for her was increased. Burning with desire to relieve her mind from any latent doubt she might entertain, the Baron rushed to her boudoir, where he found her reclining on an ottoman, and regarding with an air of melancholy and distraction the wedding trousseau which had been prepared for her, and which lay untouched in a distant corner of the room.

"Nay, love," said the impetuous Baron, throwing himself at her side, and pressing her fondly to his heart, "why this serious mood—this seeming mistrust of myself—of my desire to make you my own adored and honored wife!"

She burst into tears and pillowed her face upon his bosom, sobbing violently.

"Ah! what but disgrace can I bring you after the past? I have been thinking seriously of this. De Boiscourt, dear de Boiscourt, I am yours, you know how dearly; but let not a mere sense of honor and delicacy induce you to fulfil a vow made under far, far different circumstances. I will be still yours, but without the form of a marriage, which must later bring regret and repentance to you."

"Noble and devoted girl!" rejoined the Baron, with unspeakable tenderness of voice and manner, again, and affectionately, he drew her to his heart, "ten thousand times more am I wedded to my purpose. No woman but yourself, wears the proud name of de Boiscourt's wife."

"Oh, God! is it possible?" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, and raising them with her dark and humid eyes towards Heaven. "And shall I, the unhappy child of crime and shame, be indeed so cherished, so regarded, so honored? Ah! no; for the moment, de Boiscourt, you think so, but when time shall have sated your ardent desire, and the offspring of our passion stands before you in licentious blood, will you not then curse its mother, even as I have reason to curse mine?"

"Nay, dear Henriette, can it be possible that you thus misjudge me. Listen to me, dearest, and you will learn how little cause there would be

for me to pursue so inhuman a course, even were it possible that I should do so. No one knows the secret but your mother, and him whose name I will not raise the blush to your cheek by naming. The former, I am glad to say, is dead, and no human consideration, you may be well assured, will induce the latter to betray or even expose himself. If, therefore, no one but ourselves possess the secret—what fear of the opinion of the world—the bug-bear that men most shun upon earth! No! my beloved, you were my wife yesterday and shall be so to-day. All is arranged. This night the Bishop pronounces the vows with which we cheat the world into much belief of virtue, and never after that approaches us.

"Oh! generous, noble de Boiscourt," said the agitated girl—"how, how shall I repay this nobleness of soul? Some relief it is to know that guilty man, whom I abhor not for myself so much as for you, shall never more address me. I cannot bear to look at him, and only your presence, and the rite he desecrates, could sustain me now."

"Then let me see you brilliant in smiles, and forgetfulness of all that has occurred to distress you. Think of yourself only as Henriette de Gaston, the charming, chosen of Ernestina—the gentle dove brought up by her to nestle later in her husband's bosom."

"Oh! how good you are—how you bring consolation to a heart that else, indeed were most truly wretched, De Boiscourt, you will make me love you very much."

"Besides, what matter, love," he returned smiling, while he pressed her fondly to his bosom—"what matter even were the Countess guiltier far than yet we know. Not the birth itself but the manner of our days must form the test by which all human worth is judged. Have we not watched you as our own, and made part and parcel of ourselves. Mere birth enlarges not—ennobles not the soul. Education does. But hush, love, there is some one at the door.—Come in."

The door was opened, and the gentle Zuleima, who had in some degree been made acquainted with the events of the morning, appeared at the entrance.

"Ah! my dear bridesmaid," said Henriette, rallying—"come to give me courage to don these trappings, which tell the world Henriette de Gaston is this night to be the happiest of women."

"Then will I leave you with her to talk of this," said de Boiscourt, imprinting a kiss upon the cheek of his beloved. "Zuleima, it is long since our lips have met, and strange things have happened since they did. Rudolph must not be jealous of this. I have, you know, a prior claim."

The heaving of the bosom of the Saracen, and the crimson which gathered on her cheek, proclaimed how deeply she retained the impression left on her mind by the recollection.

"Oh! Rudolph will never be jealous of those he loves," remarked Henriette. "You will not let him, dearest, will you?"

"Rudolph loves the Baron too dearly for him ever to be jealous," said the Saracen with a sigh. "Can Henriette's husband say the same," she added, laughingly.

"It is as Henriette shall decide," remarked de Boiscourt, as he pressed the glowing cheek of the charming bridesmaid.

"Nothing will I interpose to prevent a repetition of that kiss, or make our union any but a happy one," said the young girl, with animated look and voice.

"You hear that, dear Zuleima," said the Baron; "but I must leave you to settle what is the true point of jealousy between yourselves. I must with Rudolph to superintend the arrangements for our marriage;" and once more fondly embracing the young girl, he departed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHILE Henriette and Zuleima are forming, in all the generosity of heart peculiar to them, their delightful plans for the future, and the Baron and Rudolph are engaged in superintending the preparations for the grand ceremonial of the evening, let us take the opportunity of briefly narrating to the reader, the manner in which, as stated to her uncle, who in his turn had communicated the facts to de Boiscourt, the Countess of Clermont contrived to escape from the gloomy tomb into which she had been introduced by the unhappy and heart-broken Monk-Knight.

When left alone, in utter darkness, with the dying *Cœur-de-Fer*, to whose body she was too firmly secured to hope for a release, the agony of her fear was such that for some time she had lost her senses, and when she did recover them, it was only to yell in fiendish hate against the authors of the anguish that filled her soul. Desperation gave her the strength of a lioness, and with prodigious efforts she managed to gain her feet, dragging up in the act, to her side, the heavy body of her now dead paramour, and, moving step by step in the utter darkness that prevailed, sustained by the hope that she might encounter some cutting instrument, or sharp and detached stone, which might rend asunder the strong bonds that united them. By a refinement of cruelty in the just punishment he had inflicted upon her, the Monk-Knight had left her the complete liberty of her hands, being well-assured that she could find nothing in that damp cell to undo the firm series of knots in the small but strong cord, which bound waist to waist, in the closest possible contact, and therefore she was enabled to grope with her hands along the wall, still dragging the heavy corpse along with her. At length she came to an opening, which, from her description, must have been one of the cells in which the Lady Ernestina and the Monk-Knight had been confined. This opening she entered, and a ray of hope entered her sick soul, as she felt for the time the iron railing, which seemed to promise the approach to some spot where relief might be obtained. Suddenly her progress was stayed by an obstacle striking against her knees. She put her hand down, it was the low bed which had been occupied by the Lady Ernestina. The body of *Cœur-de-Fer* struck against it also, and, overbalanced,

fell over, dragging her this time over with him. Fatigued as she was with the superhuman efforts she had made, her senses could not resist the luxurious inducement to repose. Scarcely had she touched the soft cushions when she fell asleep, with her arms involuntarily thrown around the neck of the dead man, in order to obtain more room on the narrow couch. According to her belief she must have slept for days and nights; for although she had not felt hunger before, the gnawings of appetite were now so fierce upon her that she groaned in a new agony. The ferocity of her hunger hourly increased. She attempted to rise to distract her attention by motion, but she found this to be impossible. Her strength was gradually lessening, and the fast stiffening body of *Cœur-de-Fer* opposed a resistance she had not hitherto experienced. The burning pangs of hell were even in her heart. Hunger seemed to scorch up her very entrails. She shrieked madly through the sombre vaults. The echoes of the curses and cries she uttered were the only response. Had the Lady Ernestina been there she would have torn out her heart with her fingers and devoured it. Suddenly a new idea took possession of her soul. Had there been light it would have betrayed the fiendish expression of her glassy eye. It endeavored to penetrate the darkness but could not: she tore the covering from the upper form of *Cœur-de-Fer*, and fastened her teeth into the cold and lifeless, yet still quivering shoulder. The blood came slowly, yet did not appease her appetite. The rage of hunger grew more ardent, more intolerable. She gnawed into the fast corroding flesh, and greedily swallowed the nauseous food. She appeased her hunger, but soon a sickening sensation of loathing came over her, and she disgorged the putrid mass. In her agony and disappointment at not being able to retain the disgusting nutriment, she uttered furious shrieks and threw her arms wildly around. As they fell, exhausted with her strong action, over her head, her hands suddenly rested upon the table which had been placed there by the Lady Ernestina. A new hope now stirred within her. She passed one hand rapidly over the table, and the revulsion of her mind from despair to hope may be conceived when it encountered the knife which had before been used, although she knew it not, to give freedom to the limbs of the tenants of that dark abode. In the fierceness of her surprise, she grasped the blade unconsciously and inflicted a slight wound upon her hand, but soon possessing herself of the handle, cut away the cords which bound her to the loathsome form of *Cœur-de-Fer*.

She breathed, and freely, for even in her anguish she had found a joy—she was a shade less wretched than before. She rose from the bed, and with light head and trembling feet. A secret instinct told her that the table might supply her with other means of relief. She approached it, and groping, placed her hands upon what appeared to her to be, and what on smelling it, she found was, a pig's cheek. This she greedily seized and devoured, until scarce a particle of flesh remained upon it. Her raging hunger appeased, she sought for water. Again she groped along the table: her hand now encountered a bottle filled with liquid. With the knife she still held in her hand she knocked off the neck. She smelt it; it was wine. She knew not of what precise quality, but still it was wine. She placed

the shattered neck to her lips, nor did she remove it until she had drained the whole of its contents. Revived by this, she proceeded to grope for an exit, which she thought could not be far distant, seeing that there were such strong evidences of some of the comforts—even luxuries of life around her. Still all was dark as midnight. Again she groped along the bars which conducted to an opening which led again to a wall of some extent. On arriving at the extremity, she was astonished on looking up to see the light of day admitted through a small square aperture nearly over her head. A human face was looking down into the darkness. She uttered a shriek so startling that the whole cavern resounded with it, as with the explosion of a mine. A cry of terror was answered from above, and the face had disappeared. The wretched woman examined more closely, and found that instead of going deeper into the grated rooms she had turned upon her own steps, and was even now at the very spot whence she had set out. It was evident to her that this was the only chance of escape, and that it had been afforded to her by some passing peasant who had seen the ring and lifted up the trap-door, in order to indulge his curiosity, but who, alarmed by her terrifying cry, had suddenly fled, leaving the door unclosed. With horror at her heart, lest some unforeseen occurrence should again close the means of egress to her, she rushed up the steps like a maniac, with the knife still tightly grasped in her hand, and fired with jealousy and a desire of vengeance, which were rendered more fiendish by the fumes of the strong potion she had taken, repaired to the chateau, terrified the servants, who, believing her to be a ghost, fled at her approach, and entered the boudoir of Henriette, whom she mistook, for the rival of whose unhappy fate she was, of course, ignorant—and enacted the scene which has already been described.

CONCLUSION.

SCARCELY need we dwell upon the particulars of the union of de Boiscourt with his beloved Henriette. The ceremony was performed with all the pomp and dignity usual to people in high condition in similar circumstances, and little did the mass of guests there assembled, imagine that the retired and modest-looking bride who entered, leaning on the arm of the man she adored, already carried beneath her heart the foundation of a noble line, they were there met to see legalized by the forms of the Church. Henriette looked absolutely ravishing in her beauty, and Zuleima, who regarded her with great admiration, whispered in the ear of Rudolph, while she pressed his hand, that he seemed to think so too. The handsome Page, now fully grown in manhood, acknowledged with a deep blush, that he did, but slyly retorted that his beloved wife seemed equally impressed with the commanding form and manliness of de Boiscourt. Zuleima looked up into his face and smiled; then when she saw a very provoking expression in his wicked eyes, she dropped her own and colored up to the brow.

The ceremony was performed with great solemnity and dignity by the Bishop of Clermont, who, after reading a grave homily on the purity, and sanctity, and exclusiveness of the marriage-bed, and condemning guilty indulgence in the flesh, went through the formulæ usual on these occasions. The most brilliant festivities succeeded, but long ere these were ended, the wife and the husband, wild with impetuous love, had disappeared, leaving Rudolph and the tender Zuleima to finish the honors they had begun themselves. At length, to the great relief of the latter, the guests departed, well pleased with the manner of their entertainment, and all the old maids of the village—for strange to say, there were still some in Auvergne—enchanted with the sermon on continence, which had been so eloquently preached by the Bishop, very properly looked upon in his diocese as an uncompromising enemy to the lusts of the flesh.

In the whole of Auvergne—nay, in the whole of France, there were not two happier couples than those of whom we reluctantly take our leave, or whose imaginations dwelt more dreamily on the charm of that indissoluble wedded love linked their glowing souls in confidence and friendship. From the hot loves of the Baron and the charming Henriette sprang a long and honorable line, the last of which perished in the last of the hundred revolutions of France—thus relieving us of our pledge to the old *garde-chasse*.

THE END.

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